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Gender and Story in South India

EDITED BY
LEELA PRASAD
RUTH B. BOTTIGHEIMER
LALITA HANDOO

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Gender and Story in South India

SUNY series in Hindu Studies

Wendy Doniger, editor

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State University of New York Press

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Contents

Acknowledgments vii

1. Anklets on the Pyal: Women Present Women's Stories from South India 1
   Leela Prasad

2. The Son-in-law Story: Gender and Genre 35
   Lalita Handoo

3. The Role of Gender in Tale-Telling Events 55
   Saraswathi Venugopal

4. Voiced Worlds: Heroines and Healers in Muslim Women's Narratives 67
   K. V. S. Lakshmi Narasamamba

5. Transformation of Gender Roles: Converging Identities in Personal and Poetic Narratives 87
   P. S. Kanaka Durga

Afterword 141
Ruth B. Bottigheimer

Contributors 143

Index 147

Map of Modern India

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RBB

1

Anklets on the Pyal: Women Present Women's Stories from South India

LEELA PRASAD

Ululuuluulu-a, hāyi
Effortlessly
May you overcome troubles
Ululuuluulu-a, hāyi

A girl is born, a swan is born
A boy is born, a pearl is born
Ululuuluulu-a, hāyi

Do not weep, do not weep, my silly little girl
If you weep, your eyes will flow with tears
Ululuuluulu-a, hāyi

Do not weep, do not weep, my silly little girl
I cannot bear to see tears flow from your eyes
Ululuuluulu-a, hāyi

Let it be milk instead that flows from your golden eyes
Ululuuluulu-a, hāyi

Bogeyman, come here, weaving your baskets
Give us the little girl in your basket and go
Ululuuluulu-a, hāyi

I am grateful to Ruth Bottigheimer and Pika Ghosh for help in fine-tuning this introductory chapter. Any discordant notes that remain are mine.

Hāyamma, Bāyamma, sisters
Īgamma, Dōmamma, co-sisters
Ululuuluulu-a, hāyi

Cinnārī, Ponnārī, come little Srī Lakṣmī
Come Ādi Lakṣmī, come and play with mother

Sri Rama, victorious Rama, beautiful Rama
Tell me, who is Rāma? Sita of the Rāghavas!
Ululuuluulu-a, hāyi

Has the little girl out at play come back?
I hear anklets on the pyal
Ululuuluulu-a, hāyi

This Telugu cradle song[1] that I have heard and sung many times comes to mind as I write the introductory chapter of this volume. Perhaps because it is a woman's song, perhaps because it is sung by women, or perhaps because it addresses a girl child. Or perhaps simply because it links me to my mother, to my grandmother before her, to my daughters after me—and calls up the remarkable crisscrossing ways in which women in India assimilate "women's experiences" and arrive at self-understandings that are deeply shared despite their divergences and fluidity. This volume, one might say, is about divergences and fluidity that, in the main, take South Indian locales: in Andhra Pradesh, the Eastern Godavari district, Hyderabad city, and the village of Chavarambakam in Chittoor district; in Tamilnadu, Uttumalai in Tirunelveli district and Madurai city; and various parts of Karnataka, Konkan, Pondicherry, and Kerala.[2] These essays on women-centered narratives draw on stories and songs heard and narrated, of literatures remembered, of practices observed and absorbed, and of distances traveled and felt to explore connections between the social and the imagined worlds of women in India. Thus gender converses with other aspects of identity: men and women are also Shi'a Muslims, or from the Golla [cowherd] community, or urban-dwelling, or university educated.

The emotional power of the cradle song comes not only from its alliterative melody, but also from its unselfconscious empathy with women's worlds and its female-oriented poetic. The mother, singing the song, asks

for divine protection as she celebrates the birth of a child. The child, girl or boy, is as precious, rare, and pure as a swan or a pearl, both things of great beauty, one connoting gracefulness and the other, wealth. The mother empathizes with her baby daughter—sorrow for a daughter is sorrow for a mother—but like the many women narrators in this volume, she is aware of women's predicaments beyond her own when she seeks "the girl in the basket" of the bogeyman [būcivāḍa]. Is this girl in the basket abandoned, is she unwanted, or is she just a plaything? Whichever she may be, she is wanted, to be included with "us." The mother points her daughter toward worlds peopled by womenfolk: in the natal home are Hāyamma and Bāyamma, her sisters, and in the conjugal home, Īgamma and Dōmamma will be her cosisters, or wives of her brothers-in-law. Tellingly, while the names Hāyamma and Bāyamma are comforting (one of the meanings of *hāyi* is comfort), *īgā*, the word for housefly, and *dōma*, the word for mosquito, suggest that female company in the conjugal home may not be congenial, in fact, even annoying.

The child (endearingly called "cinnāri, ponnāri") is addressed as Lakṣmī, using an affectionate form of address commonly reserved for little girls who are considered bringers of prosperity. While extolling Rāma, the prince-god of the epic of the Rāmāyaṇa, in traditional praise-language as victorious and beautiful, the mother teasingly asks Sītā of the Rāghavas (Rāma's dynasty) who Rāma is. Or does the mother also remind us gently that Rāma can be recalled by turning to Sītā? Female presences are strong, and, as Narayana Rao shows, women's Rāmāyaṇa songs from coastal Andhra Pradesh tell us a "Rāmāyaṇa of their own."[3] Prominent in brahman women's songs are not the heroic martial adventures of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, but the day-to-day events in the lives of the women of the Rāmāyaṇa. "Non-brahman songs," evincing even less interest in Rāma when compared to Rāvaṇa, also similarly sympathize with Sītā, although their critique targets men of the upper caste in whose fields they work (Narayana Rao 1991).

This chapter's title is inspired by the final lines of the song and suggests how this volume has been imagined. The mother in the song hears anklets on the pyal, the sound reminding her of a daughter out at play who is perhaps returning home. In older homes in South India, the pyal is a raised platform made of stone or wood that runs alongside the main door. Either enclosed or opening into a courtyard or a street, the pyal is used for activities such as casual socializing and leisure, for summertime resting, for children's play, and for bargaining with itinerant vendors. Culturally, the pyal is a rich metaphor

for multipurpose space that is at once inner and outer, at once *akam* (inner) and *puṟam* (outer), and claimed by men, women, and children alike.[5]

One of the first gifts a girl child in South India receives is a pair of silver anklets (*andālū* or *paṭṭālū* in Telugu). The anklet indexes female ownership, is integral to the aesthetic of everyday or ceremonial adornment, accentuating femininity, and is an intimate and necessary detail in performative arts like dance. Simultaneously, however, the anklet implies subtle and looming differences in class, social status, and symbolic value, differences that have been evocatively treated in poetic imagination. In Iḷanko Aṭikaḷ's extraordinary Tamil epic of the fifth century C.E., *Cilappatikāram*, the "epic of an anklet," a gem-filled anklet becomes an instrument of truth. R. Parthasarathy, in the introduction to his translation of the epic, reflects on the symbolism of the anklet as it appears in different places in the epic and with different owners. If at times it connotes female beauty and chastity, or seductiveness, at other times, it evokes loss or widowhood that culminates in rage, vengeance, and sexual energy. Kaṇṇaki, the heroine, gives her anklet to her husband, Kōvalan, who takes it to the market to exchange for money. Cheated by a greedy goldsmith, he is wrongfully accused of having stolen the queen's anklet and is executed by the king. Distraught by the news, Kaṇṇaki proves to the shamed king that Kōvalan was innocent: her anklet is filled with gems, while the queen's is filled with pearls. The enraged Kaṇṇaki, who becomes a fiery goddess, tears off her breast and flings it at the city of Madurai, and Madurai is consumed in the flames of her curse. At one point before Kōvalan's execution is a poignant and ironic scene in which the remorse-stricken Kōvalan, who has abandoned Kaṇṇaki for a courtesan, returns. Mistakenly thinking he needs more jewelry to pamper the courtesan, Kaṇṇaki spontaneously offers, "My anklets. Here! Take them" (Parthasarathy 1993: 92). The anklet is transformed constantly in the epic but it also transforms the epic, and the same can be said of folktales that tell this story.[6]

The anklets evoke overlapping worlds of memory, femininity, and play, worlds that the narratives in this volume explore and interrogate. In these narrative settings, female roles, and role-playing itself, are open to scrutiny as they are enacted, enjoyed, suffered, reversed, or negotiated by characters in the stories or by narrators themselves. Cultural types like the son-in-law are laughed at, bawdy body lore is enjoyed, and overt misogynist narratives are interrupted, endorsed, or reworked. The narratives are exuberant in their sense of play. As studies of play demonstrate, play can in fact marginalize players when it cloaks unequal power relations and

makes frames fuzzy and the playing-field unclear (Lindquist 2001). But play also indicates creativity, freedom to become, and a place where critique is possible (Bateson 1972; Sutton-Smith 1997).

The four following essays recount and analyze stories that are unified by A. K. Ramanujan's understanding that women-centered narrative is one that is narrated by women, is shared among women, is about women, or is a varying combination of these (1991). This, however, does not exclude men's voices and men's presence in the storytelling and conversational settings that the essays discuss. Ramanujan uses a Kannada story about a woman told by women to suggest the following characteristics of women-centered tales: (1) heroines are either already married or marry early, and with marriage begin trials; (2) symbols that may appear in animal- or in male-centered tales take on different meanings in women-centered tales countering "constructs and stereotypes"; (3) the stories typically illustrate female creativity and agency that reflect women's ability to tell and make heard, an observation Ramanujan draws from Ruth Bottigheimer's study of the Grimms' household tales (1987).

A Prelude From Hassan, Karnataka

The label on my audiocassette reads: *Lalitāmba, Singer from Hassan, Karnataka. 14 April 1995. Sringeri.* It would have remained a casual entry among the many I made during my fieldwork for another project, if it did not unstring the memory of the itinerant woman singer in her midtwenties walking down the street with her baby in a sling, a small harmonium on her side, singing for her livelihood. Her vibrant, clear voice ignored the cacophony of the traffic of Sringeri, a small but busy pilgrimage town of southwestern Karnataka, as she sang "*tavaru mane*" songs (songs of a woman's natal home). The dismal realism of her songs and the resonant pathos of her rendering have remained with me over the years. One song was a plea to a bangle seller: *Please go to my natal home, bangle seller / Come back and tell me about the happenings there / But when you go, don't tell them that my life is being wrung out here. / Instead show them these symbols [bangles] of my sumaṅgali status.*[7] Another song's refrain was, *As long as mother was alive / the natal home was ours. / After her death / God alone is our succor.* I impulsively recorded a handful of her songs, of which I translate one fully here. Her repertoire of that afternoon is directly in conversation with the essays of this volume whose words and worlds eddy out into many

homes and lives across India. I reproduce this song also to finally acknowledge our fleeting—and probably our only—encounter, deep for me, but in all likelihood nothing for her. And perhaps too because the song and its singer iconize that powerful itinerant process by which narratives by and about women are told, half-told, or remain untold, are heard, half-heard, overheard, or even not heard in Indian society. Itinerant narratives—as all narratives at some point become as they discover newer and newer contexts—nevertheless leave profound, manifold impressions that shape perceptions of the gendered universe.

Lalitāmba—from the brief conversation we had before she moved on to the next house—was from Hassan in central Karnataka, and made a living from street-singing in different parts of neighboring Chikmagalur district in Karnataka (where Sringeri is located). She knew about twenty songs at that time, and was unsure about where she had learned them. Most of these songs were about dilemmas of women caught between natal and conjugal affinities. My neighbor, a young mother of two boys who listened to these songs along with me (we had been chatting when Lalitāmba entered our street) asked her why she sang only "*tavaru mane hāḍugaḷu*" [natal-home songs]. Lalitāmba replied, "It's mostly women who listen to my songs, and they ask for such songs" (April 1995).

After sending me away from my natal home[8]
don't forget me, annaiyya [elder brother]

Never having seen a mother or father
We are orphans, o annaiyya

Annaiyya
don't forget me, annaiyya

Who can I call "mother," annaiyya?
Mother, father, kith and kin, in this life, you are all to me

Who can I call "mother," annaiyya?
Mother, father, kith and kin, in this life, you are all to me

In this life, don't weep on my account, annaiyya
In this life, don't weep on my account, annaiyya

Being a *muttaida*[9]—in this life, that is enough for me

Annaiyya
don't forget me, annaiyya

After sending me away from my natal home
don't forget me, annaiyya
Never having seen a mother or father
We are orphans, o annaiyya
Annaiyya
don't forget me, annaiyya

When I was a baby, you rocked me in the cradle
When I could speak and walk, you begged for alms and raised me

Getting me married to a blind man
you showed me the path to a town I had never seen

Annaiyya
don't forget me, annaiyya

After sending me away from my natal home
don't forget me, annaiyya
Never having seen a mother or father
Orphan, that is me

The husband who tied my *thāḷi*,[10] he is god, annaiyya
Being a *muttaide*—in this life, that is enough for me

The money we scrape together is enough for us to eat and sleep
The road to my natal home is thorn-ridden, annaiyya

Annaiyya—
don't forget me, annaiyya

What can I give you in this life, annaiyya?
In the next birth, become my father, annaiyya
I will be born your son and repay my debt to you
I will be born your son and repay my debt to you

Annaiyya—
don't forget me, annaiyya

Annaiyya—
don't forget me, annaiyya

Lalitāmba's song highlights the emphases of the essays in this volume, which address South Indian kin worlds, women's anguish amid a patriarchal normative, and a multivocal ironic subjectivity that inverts but also seeks continuities with the priorities of a male-centered world. The song plays out the familiar push and pull between the natal home that a married woman longs for and the conjugal one to which she is bound. The marked absence of other women in the song emphasizes the isolation felt by the female protagonist in the song. In this case, the brother, the annaiyya, *is* the natal home, and signifies *all* natal connections. From this comes the desperation: "Don't forget me, Annaiyye." If metonymically the brother is the natal family, he then bears the obligation of getting his sister married and helping her achieve the auspicious status of a *muttaide* (married woman), an obligation that could potentially mark the closure of his responsibility. But she reminds him that he must not forget that he is also a brother, one who conventionally bridges natal and conjugal homes for a sister. The brother, we learn, has brought her up through self-sacrifice and hardship, but has married her to a blind man, ironically showing her "the path to a strange town."

The female protagonist is constrained by a system of patriarchal transactions and is dogged by material hardship, but clearly she is not rendered voiceless. She articulates, through the use of irony, a sad critique of the brother she loves. Her brother's sense of inevitable duty has sacrificed the only possession she has tangibly held: her sense of belonging. The rites of marriage have initiated her into a second orphanhood, making her a twice-born orphan. In a subtle, swift change in a line in the refrain ("Orphan, that is me" from "We are orphans"), she notes that they no longer share a common predicament. The recurring line "in this life [*bāḷinalli*]" is double-edged. It emphasizes a culturally rich inheritance she has received in this life—the status of *muttaide*—but an inheritance that has become burdensome. The narrator uses the word "*sākaiyya*," which I translate as "enough for me" but the word also connotes being "fed up."[11] Dispossessed even of her natal home, the path to which is now thorn-ridden, she asks her brother, "What can I give you in this life?" The answer suggests that she also inherits also something she must carry over into the next life: a debt. And it is a debt that cannot be repaid—unless she is born a man, and unless her brother is reborn as her father. The debt can then be repaid through the father-son relationship, considered by Hindu scriptures a legitimate route for the dispensation of debt (*pitṛ ṛṇa*). Why is this debt incurred at all when the brother has after all performed his duty? Perhaps the answer to this question is partly in the earlier observation that roles

played out in life create moral meanings and transformations. The brother, by performing the duty *of a father,* has created an additional constellation of relationships with his sister. These relationships draw her into a different orbit of affections and obligations. All kinds of shifts are necessary for the debt to be repaid, it seems, and once again a very fine line is drawn between bonding and bondage. These shifts are implied in the semantic polyphony of the word *ṛṇa*. And although the sister acknowledges the magnitude of the brother's stepping beyond his role, her critique is perhaps enhanced by what she does not say. Why does she not say that she will be born as his mother in the next birth? Does she feel that the brother has done his duty perfunctorily, even callously, by committing her to a "blind" man? Or does she feel that a life of reciprocated relationships is a privilege available only to males, and hence were she able to choose her next birth, she would choose the life of a son (but with a memory that can retrieve the affections and mortgages of a previous female birth)?

Gloria Raheja and Ann Gold, presenting a rich selection of women's stories and songs from Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (1994), also note that frequently, what one encounters in women's oral traditions is an ironic commentary on the discourse of patriliny which demonstrates a "critical awareness of [patriliny's] contradictions. The irony in these songs does not seek to displace that discourse entirely but to question its claim to exclusive moral authority" (Raheja 1994: 105). Raheja and Gold similarly find that morally and emotionally laden brother-sister ties are enacted in oral narratives, and that these ties could also have considerable economic implications as in elaborate gift-giving. Peter Claus observes that even in the matrilineal society of Tulunad, in Karnataka, the brother-sister bond is salient and the brother has a "strong moral obligation" to ensure the welfare of his sister and her children (1991: 141). Indeed, brother-sister obligations carry over even to the children of the brother and the children of the sister. In one *pāḍdana* (women's ritual narrative-songs sung in the fields), the brother uses his moral bond with his sister to send her back to her husband (Claus 1991).

While women-centered narratives cherish brotherly love, heroism, and chivalry (celebrated in festivals like *nagapanchami* in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and *rakshabandhan* in north India), they are all too aware of the fragility of sibling ties. Thus, in this volume, in the essays by Kanaka Durga (in "The Tale of the Sister's Sacrifice" or "The Tale of Dēvanamma") and Lakshmi Narasamamba (in the brother-and-sister tale), brother-sister relationships take dangerous turns into competitive, incestuous, or exploitative territories.

Narrator-Worlds

Ethnographically situated folktale collections began to emerge as a distinct genre in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century in India, and it is pertinent to note that many of these collections considered women to be repositories of folk narrative. In 1868, an extraordinary collection of folktales called *Old Deccan Days, or Hindoo Fairy Legends, Current in Southern India,* was published by Mary Frere. Traveling in Southwestern India with her father, Bartle Frere, then governor of Bombay Presidency, Mary Frere collected stories from her ayah and traveling companion, Anna Liberata de Souza, a Calicut-born Goan Christian who had settled in Pune. The twenty-four tales in *Old Deccan Days* are preceded by several layers of authorial narrative of which the longest is an autobiographical reflection in English by Anna de Souza that Mary Frere tells us she transcribed. In this section titled "The Narrator's Narrative," Anna tells us about events and choices in her life and about her relationships with her mother, her grandmother, and her children. Although scores of folktale collections followed *Old Deccan Days* in colonial India, unfortunately none emulated Frere's sensitive ethnographic methodology. Nevertheless, many collectors acknowledged narration and narrative as a women's expressive domain, and collections like Alice E. Dracott's *Simla Folk Tales, or, Folktales from the Himalayas,* which comprised stories narrated by a wide range of "village women belonging to the agricultural class of Hindus in the Simla district" (1906: x) were published. But there were others that claimed for their source single woman-tellers. L. B. Day, in the Preface to his *Folktales of Bengal* writes that when R. C. Temple urged him to collect and publish "unwritten" stories, Day "readily caught up the idea and cast about for materials. But where was an old story-telling woman to be got? I had myself, when a little boy, heard hundreds—it would be no exaggeration to say thousands—of fairy tales from that same old woman, Sambhu's mother . . ." (1883: viii). Eventually collecting twenty-two stories from a variety of narrators who include a Bengali Christian woman (ten stories), two old brahman men (nine stories), an old barber (three stories), and his old servant (two stories), he concludes that he has ". . . reason to believe that the stories given in this book are a genuine sample of the old old stories told by old Bengali women from age to age through a hundred generations" (1883: ix). In *Indian Fairy Tales* (1880), a noteworthy successor to Mary Frere's *Old Deccan Days,* a teenager, Maive Stokes, presents stories narrated to her "by two Ayahs, Dunkni and

Muniya, and by Karim, a Khidmatgar [servant, orderly]" (Stokes 1880: v). Muniya, we later learn is a "very white-haired old woman," and Dunkni, a younger woman who had heard the stories from her husband. Mary Stokes, Maive Stokes's mother, occasionally includes the narrators' views in the "Notes" to the collection. Pandit S. M. Natesa Sastri's four-volume *Folklore of Southern India* (1884) names its sources as his grandmother and his stepmother. And yet, with the exception of Mary Frere's collection, the woman narrator appears in the folktale collection only to depart as soon as the stories begin to unfold. This elusive depiction of the narrator, while noting her as an inveterate storyteller, did not celebrate her lived life as a woman. But one could argue that these folktale collections were not concerned with the day-to-day materiality of the storyteller's life, and consequently they caulked the interactive spaces and moments in which narrations happen, making invisible the storyteller's verbal inventiveness.

The preference for narrative over narrator (and the symbiotic relationship between the two) becomes problematic in collections that explicitly claim stories as straightforward transcripts of cultural practice—a position that overrules the world and work of imagination. Collections of folktales published in recent decades (Beck et al. 1986; Ramanujan 1993; 1997), which also owe a debt to unnamed grandmothers, are, however, more reserved about eliciting cultural "truths" from the tales, and seek instead a robust appreciation of the tales as they engage with each other and with other literatures and cultural sites. Illustrating this is Ramanujan's observation: "A folktale is a poetic text that carries some of its cultural context within it; it is also a traveling metaphor that finds a new meaning with each new telling. . . . one should bear in mind that these tales are meant to be read for pleasure first, to be experienced as aesthetic objects" (Preface, Ramanujan 1993).

Although the essays in this volume do not consciously align themselves with the bittersweet history of the characterization of female narrators, they nevertheless speak to it. They reveal instead that rather than silently departing from collections of narratives that claim female sources, women narrators are present everywhere in the narrative experience (whose beginnings and closures are incredibly elastic) and that gender is forefronted (not backgrounded) in the making of cultural meaning. Further, the essays in this volume written in 1995,[12] share with recent works in life history and narrative the insight that the intersections between a narrator's life and the stories she tells are not predictable or simplistically mappable, but that intersections do exist and can be dialogically explored by

researcher and narrator (Marriott 1989; Grima 1992; Mines 1994; Gold 1994; Narayan 1997). Moreover, "meanings" ascribed to stories by narrators could change with the passage of time and with the gathering of further life experiences. Other recent collections of essays on South Asian expressive forms persuasively demonstrate the inexhaustible relevance of the study of gender in everyday life (kinship, foodways, dress, communicative practices), sacred landscape, ritual, and performance traditions (see, e.g., Blackburn and Ramanujan 1986; Claus, Handoo, and Pattanayak 1987; Appadurai, Korom, and Mills 1991; Kumar 1994; Raheja and Gold 1994; Feldhaus 1995; Busby 2000).[13] This pervasiveness of gender in quotidian economic and ceremonial life is treated with excellent, reflexive contextualization by Leela Dube in her work in the Lakshadweep Islands and in Central India (2001). Lively debates on the politics of ethnographic practice, and postcolonial critiques of knowledge-making have helped scholars articulate a praxis that is historically situated and socially sensitized (Marcus and Clifford 1986; Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993). But to "new" turns in ethnographic practice, feminist critiques have proved time and again that gender-blind cultural maps are often simply products of optical illusion, if not cultivated blindness (for elaborations, see Visweswaran 1988; Gordon and Behar 1995; John 1996; Dube 2001). And as Margaret Mills notes, "Too often in critical-historical reviews, post-modern or not, 'I didn't see it' is allowed to imply 'It wasn't there'" (1993: 184). Fine-grained literature on feminist ethnography and narrative reminds us that the speaking voices of women narrators belong to living bodies of women, so that their narrating universe is thoroughly in conversation, back and forth, with self-perceptions, with other persons, and with broader aspects of social life (Abu-Lughod 1993; Jordan and Kalcik 1985; Dwyer 1978; Gluck and Patai 1991; Kumar 1994; Narayan 1997; for example). The essays in this volume show that women narrators not only exist alongside male narrators but that the alongside-position is both vigorously competitive and cooperative.

In the essays by Handoo, Narasamamba, and Venugopal one is not likely to find detailed self-reflection on the wheres, whys, and hows of the author's presence and agenda in her research setting. But perhaps these essays still remind us that co-presence, which is recognized today as existing beyond the bounds of orally articulated discourse (e.g., Mills 1991), also just as certainly exists beyond that which is cataloged, even "genred" by reflexive ethnography. I find myself thinking about how reflexivity is a process of partial and provisional disentanglement as we try to capture

those deep intersecting, overlapping, tumbling, and changing ways in which we experience and understand our personhood. While I leave it to readers to dwell on the shades of reflexivity one encounters in this volume, it is nevertheless important to point out that the authors of this volume draw on their lives in India as women for the interpretations they propose in this volume. Their experiences as Indian women (shaped by their class locations, alma maters, careers, and other forces) mean that they participate in self-conscious and subconscious ways, in whatever degrees of distance or involvement, and in cultural discourses and practices that implicate womanhood in India.

Lurking near these affinities is a term that has been much debated in folklore and anthropology: native. Critics point to the othering and essentializing that underlie the use of this term as belied by colonial deployments of the category "native," nationalist reappropriations of that same label, and diasporic realities that complicate claims to native land (Appadurai 1988; Malkii 1999; Narayan 1993; Srinivas 1976, 1998). But it remains the case that shared arenas of experience or the perception (mutual or one-sided) of shared experience makes it possible to "be native" contextually and temporarily. As Mills observes, "One thing that gender studies can add to the notion of social groups is the experiential decentering of social membership. Thus group membership for any one person becomes a Venn diagram of intersecting and superimposed circles of interaction, not all of them face-to-face, as we see now, but all involving alternative shared rules systems upon which assumed alternative shared solidarities are played out" (1993: 176). Lalita Handoo's observations about the cultural salience of the son-in-law figure come from her observations of cultural patterns, her reading of other folktale collections that link her corpus to other regions in India, her participation in women's gatherings, and in everyday life in different parts of India. Lakshmi Narasamamba tells us that being perceived as a Hindu woman interested in learning about Muslim women's lives (so that cross-cultural understandings could be built) helped her establish connections in a Muslim community, but there is little in her essay to suggest that the religious identities of researcher and community superceded their gender identities. Thus her conversations with Muslim women are not between "Hindu" and "Muslim" women, but between women who share comparable life-experiences.

Kanaka Durga chooses quite consciously to document the stories and songs of Rājamma, because she found her a "a simple woman, a replica of the folk and of popular culture who carves a domain of her own. . . ."

The temptation to read this assessment as unproblematized othering by a not-simple, not-folk researcher is preempted by Kanaka Durga's complex analysis of Rājamma's repertoire in relation to her lifestory. Even more, one realizes that the anthropological critique of the "Other" is not one that is of central importance to Kanaka Durga or Rājamma, or one that affects their relationship, which is evidently one of mutual respect, affection, and continuity.

The fact that all the authors primarily present summaries of narratives (Kanaka Durga also provides translations of narrative texts in the appendix to her essay) pushes one to think critically about "summary" as an ethnographic genre. While the summary format, hardly new, for reproducing oral narratives may be a response to academic and publishing practicalities, one wonders about how authors insert themselves into summaries of other people's narratives by selecting "luminous" details from what they hear or record and by (re)organizing these details. What cultural continuities and authority do researchers envisage as they summarize narratives they hear, and transcribe moments of participation? What subtexts of personal experience guide these processes of summary, transcription and translation, and what kinds of authorships are implicated? How do prior relationships (between narrator, researcher, audience) affect the production of summaries of oral narratives such as those in this volume?

A central line of inquiry for all the authors revolves around the ways in which narrators, most of whom are women in this volume, create and explore points of dialogue, disagreement, and tension between the narratives they tell and the social realities in which they live. Thus, Lalita Handoo considers the implications of pan-regional "narrating societies" that share stories about the "stupid son-in-law." Underlying Handoo's analysis, based on her fieldwork in Karnataka and Kashmir and on her acquaintance with other regional collections, is the question of what one can learn about women's narrative voices in settings where narrators are multiple and co-present, where they co-construct narratives actively, and where the focus is not so much on a particular female narrator as on the ambience generated by diffused female "authorship." The settings for Handoo's study are mostly "domestic," and the social occasion permits bawdy joviality whose target is the sexually and intellectually inept son-in-law. Conversely, Handoo asks, what does the *tale type* itself, pervasive as it clearly is, say about female communities of narrators and listeners? She speculates, "despite the son-in-law's high social status in the Indian kinship system, the popularity of stupid son-in-law tales in India indicates the

sensitive attitudinal status of both the son-in-law and the narrating society that identifies itself with the girl's family and probably with the female sex as a whole."

Handoo's insight is in keeping with Joyce Flueckiger's work, which rigorously demonstrates connections between women's statuses in actual lives and female images in performed traditions. Flueckiger shows that in Chhattisgarhi genres like bhojalī, ḍālkhāī, and suā nāc, which Chhattisgarhi residents claim to be distinctive to the region, women, either as performers of songs and stories or as heroines of popular narratives, celebrate and enjoy powers and potentialities through dramatic enactment (1996). In earlier work, Flueckiger finds that women consistently appear in leading roles across several Chhattisgarhi genres, and she relates this to the greater freedom, visibility, and status Chhattisgarhi women have when compared to women in Uttar Pradesh. She says, "Freed from the restraints of upholding the traditional ideology of a specific caste and promoting its martial ethos, the epic in Chhattisgarhi . . . is closer to being a model 'of' Chhattisgarhi society than a model 'for' it. The epic is not, however, a mere reflection of Chattisgarhi society. Rather, it is also an arena in which an alternative social model is exposed, explored, and given voice" (1989: 53).

If certain contexts make female audiences and women tellers convergе for Lalita Handoo, in a sense pluralizing the female narrator, in Saraswathi Venugopal's essay, the narrator—for the audience—is part of a broader landscape in which the depiction of gender in the narrative seems to take precedence over the gender of the narrator. The two small, informal groups of Tamil men and women in the village of Uttumalai (in Tirunelveli district) and the city of Madurai seem to diverge in their responses, not because of their geographical and economic particularities (as Venugopal initially supposed they would), but because of their gender identities. Venugopal wonders whether this holds lessons for other more detailed and extensive studies of audience responses in tale-telling events: Would women listeners elsewhere also cross so-called urban and rural divides to respond similarly to narratives involving women? If they did, would this comment not only on the gendered reception of audience members, but also on the perception of gendered *predicaments*?

Lakshmi Narasamamba takes up the question of what powers can be imagined to be held by oral narrative itself, and how those powers may or may not be extended to, or assumed by, the narrator. She presents narratives told by a number of women who range from a fourteen-year-old girl to a trained *ustādbi* (Muslim religious storyteller) and by two elderly men

in a Muslim community in Eastern Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh. She also includes stories narrated by a Muslim healer-couple in Hyderabad. In her study, women narrators re-architect female doorways and spaces in male-constructed domains, recognizing and restoring through expressive traditions and activities the female agency of this world. In one story about Bībī Fātima, the saint and daughter of Mohammad, the reconstruction is quite literal when Bībī Fātima appears in a devotee's dream urging women to build a women-only dargāh (a Muslim tomb of a saint). Narasamamba learned during fieldwork that trespassers to this shrine are known to have been evicted by swarms of bees! She concludes, "Women who perform and carry on narrative traditions are not just passive bearers, but are custodians, critics, reviewers, makers and remakers of societal structures."

In Kanaka Durga's essay, we see dramatic contiguities, or "convergence," to use her term, between the narrator's day-to-day world, her memories, and her vision of her years to come, and the stylized narratives she performs. Kanaka Durga thus focuses on the storyteller's repertoire. Kirin Narayan, finding similar continuities between narrators and narratives in her study in the Kangra region of Himachal Pradesh, writes,

> A repertoire is a choice selection, assembled by chance, by occasions for repeated hearing, by aesthetic predilection, and by themes compelling to the teller. As a selective corpus lodged inside a mind and shared by a sensibility, the tales in a person's repertoire relate to each other; they comment on, disagree with, and extend discussion on interrelated themes. (1997: 212)[14]

Candid conversations between Kanaka Durga and Rājamma, a sixty-year-old widow from the *golla* [cowherd] community in Chavarambakam village in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh, not only tell us about the rapport they come to share, but illuminate the crisscrossing dialogue between Rājamma's life history and her narrative repertoire. Through metaphors, poetic refrains, proverbs, and motifs, Kanaka Durga traces the sinewy relationships between events Rājamma narrates and the experiences she remembers of her life, and concludes "Narrators and narratives are not separate entities. Narrators live in the narratives they tell. . . ." The tragic death of one of Rājamma's sons and the heartrending disappearance of another relocate themselves as poetic subjects in Rājamma's performed narratives. In so doing, Kanaka Durga comes to the understanding that the transformation into poetic subjects perhaps consoles Rājamma because the tragedies, which she relives day after day, cannot know closure.

Telling On Society

Natal and conjugal homes loom large in women-narrated stories, but often, they are crowded. Or there is no room and yet plenty of space. My own friendships in India and North America have brought home to me that for many Indian women, self-expression and familial identifications are frequently tested, even tortured, at the intersections of conjugal and natal ties. At the same time, for other women, those very crossroads can be empowering. What makes, or mars, such ties, and what makes them ambiguous? As one can ask about the street singer Lalitāmba's song, what transformations are implied with regard to (expected of, enforced on) a woman's subjectivity and her body as she negotiates the sites of multiple familial loyalties? The narratives—or the summaries and retellings of them—presented in this volume speak directly and passionately, with humor and with feeling, to these questions. They ripple out to explore relationships between husbands and wives, between daughters-in-law and the conjugal family, between brothers and sisters, and between parents and children, especially daughters. Complicating this kin world are rites of passage for women, rites whose normative persuasion the narratives interrogate and sometimes simply refuse.

Some of the narratives recounted in Lakshmi Narasamamba's essay most directly do this. In the stories she analyzes, the ultimate destiny of a female heroine—a flourishing tribe in women's narratives—is not always marriage but the acquisition of martial and intellectual prowess, something the heroine demonstrates with gusto. Further, the route to marriage is off the beaten track, and marital relationships are envisaged as egalitarian, as in the story of the bādshāh's daughter who successfully overcomes superhuman hurdles and acquires magical powers.[15] On the other hand, in Rājamma's narratives (in Kanaka Durga's essay), which also depict strong women, marriage, whether by choice or by force, is fraught with risks, vulnerabilities, and ambiguities. Episodes of rape and incest in Rājamma's stories provoke one to ask more broadly how acts of violence against women are committed to collective memory and then appear in narrative.

The stories in this volume argue powerfully against one-dimensional readings of systems of social rules. Complex kin relations discourage us from imagining, for example, that the natal home is always a secure haven for a woman. Rājamma narrates a story in which a married woman continues to live in her natal home and is raped by her brother, but she also tells us a story about an unmarried woman who pledges her soul and her body to her lover,

and the couple dies to keep their love. If there is the story in which a brother rewards his talented sister with his kingdom only after he has clandestinely tested her chastity, there is also the tale in which brothers sacrifice their sister but lose their entire clan when she curses them in retaliation.

Authoritarian imperatives, as wielded by "the in-laws," are doomed in laughter and ridicule in Lalita Handoo's India-wide collection of narratives about stupid sons-in-law. The genre targets the figure of the son-in-law, who, synecdochically representing the conjugal family, is subjected to periodic checks on his power. The resultant othering implies, Handoo argues, that conjugal authority is in fact critiqued and subverted by those who seem to be its passive recipients (see also, *keśyā* songs in Raheja and Gold 1994). Further, the bawdy humor that frequently accompanies son-in-law tales punctures constructs of male sexuality by exposing the son-in-law's sexual ignorance and his fear of female sexuality. In the ludic space created by son-in-law tale narrations, ". . . resistance may be overt, or entertained unconsciously, by inverting the accepted frames of normality, by turning into a laugh what authority considers sacred, or by offering propositions that are a-moral [sic]" (Lindquist 2001: 22). A Kannada song, sung in my mother-in-law's family, comes to mind for it engages in telling ways with Handoo's narratives:[16]

Our brother-in-law went to Kashi[17]
In a boat made of steel
To get lots and lots of Ganga
In a mosquito net

O! At the pleasure of meeting
her sister, Yamuna devī
Ganga devī swelled and surged
And flailed and thrashed the boat.
Brother-in-law cried bitterly!

Our brother-in-law went to Kashi
In a boat made of steel
To get lots and lots of Ganga
In a mosquito net

O! The boat struck a rock and split open
The mosquito net fell on brother-in-law
And the rock struck him on his jaw
With all dreams of Kashi being dashed

Very grateful to have saved his mustache
Brother-in-law returned home.

Gender-specific roles, as allocated by patriarchal worldviews, are recast, and follow entirely new social scripts, in the process critiquing not just roles but role-making itself. One of Saraswathi Venugopal's narratives exploits the well-known perception that a daughter-in-law brings a particular kind of female competition into the household by reorienting emotional ties, in particular those between mother and son, and brother and sister, so that the narrative ends in the daughter-in-law's dramatic revenge against the mother-in-law who has victimized her. Outside the conjugal frame, women's resistance to patriarchy—itself a generalized term that calls for contextual analysis—as Veena Oldenburg points out, is "not a part-time or sporadic activity, but a way of life" (1991: 28; see also Caughran 1999). The authors here agree enthusiastically. Handoo writes, "Although . . . women seem to have tacitly accepted their assigned image as the 'weaker sex,' the 'oppressed,' and bearers of suffering and humiliation in the name of karma (destiny), they also seem to have, from time to time, used humor to break the stereotypes of male wisdom and superiority, and the subversion of these stereotypes is best attempted in the stories about stupid boys and stupid sons-in-law." Or, in Narasamamba's words, "Women are never silent when it comes to representing themselves in a world which is often perceived as a 'man's world.' These narratives indicate that women use their voices to claim and safeguard their own space, which is often invaded and appropriated by their male counterparts." But the space survives invasion, combats it, and frees it for women's self-expression. In "The story of the Princess in the Golden Cow," recounted in Narasamamba's essay, a mother prays for and gives birth to a girl child, flouting her husband's mandate against having female children, and is triumphantly supported by her seven sons. Often, the notion of male-only territory is shown to be specious as when women who become saints are worshipped at their own women-only dargāhs, or when women become rulers of kingdoms, or doyennes, not victims, of domestic domains.

Intriguingly, alternative destinies in these narratives do not seem to include caste-ordered worlds. Communities of listeners engage with narratives and narrators, and in audience interactions provide metanarratives that comment on actual experiences of gender in society. Venugopal's essay draws attention to instances during which metanarratives are interactively, spontaneously, and spiritedly composed. While performance analyses have

been cognizant of the tremendous roles played by audiences in shaping the performed "text" or in shaping retellings (Bauman 1984), what Venugopal's essay does is to explore how one might locate the playing out of gender in audience responses. When a tale is narrated about a victimized Chettiyar, who—caught in the competition between his two wives—ultimately has his legs broken by the two wives, the small, listening audience reacts in different ways. A man remarks, "Only the second wife can be affectionate!" and a woman says, "A man who has two wives deserves this kind of treatment!" During the narration, this same woman cites a Tamil proverb that means "Fighting between co-wives is bound to be terrible!" How do negative—even ostensibly misogynist—remarks that women make about themselves register on narrators and listeners, and how does gender moderate misogynist discourse in oral narrative settings? Or as Margaret Mills asks, perhaps the question ought to be, what does the context of such a remark's usage tell us about its lived meaning for women? To elaborate, Mills describes how her Afghan woman friend used in conversation what seemed to Mills a misogynistic proverb, "Women are seven steps ahead of the devil." However, when Mills reflects on the economically stressed and emotionally charged familial circumstances in which the friend had employed the proverb, she concludes that in fact, the friend, rather than seeking to perpetuate negative stereotypes about women, used the proverb to defiantly indicate the potential power that women held (Mills 2000). So, returning to the Tamil proverb cited above, one could explore whether other contexts of the proverb's use makes it a comment about a women's competitive protection of conjugal spaces?

In Venugopal's study, audience responses include differences in interpretation, allusions to personal situations, interjections that demand that narrative details be altered, and comments about the social veracity of narratives heard, as well as laughter, and silence—all of which suggest moments in the lives of listeners, rather than indicate an unchanging collectivity. Nevertheless, these moments are important because they reveal emergent negotiation and dialogue between men and women about gender relations. We are reminded of James Taggart's finding that oral narrations of folktales in Spanish villages in the Cáceres region display variations that are tailored by the gender of the teller, and by participation from the audience. He says, "The narrators, who hear of gender images in one tale, will modify those same images in another tale as they attempt to illustrate their views of gender relations and influence others. . . . The dialogue, when taken in its entirety, contains many exchanges that mediate the interlocked, and contradictory male and female world-views to facilitate

cooperation and the development of intimacy in courtship and marriage life" (1990: 15). Venugopal's audience-centered study has implications for those countless storytelling exchanges, lengthy and momentary, that happen seamlessly, noneventfully almost, where interactivity is accentuated.

So it all seems to argue in the end, that it is somewhat hard to imagine a narrator with no narrative, or narratives that succeed in evicting their narrators (who are also obstinate beings), and—although less difficult to conceive of—an imaginative audience who will not listen to stories. In fact, A. K. Ramanujan tells us a Telugu folktale called "A Story in Search of An Audience" (narrated by K. Katyayani in Hyderabad in 1988, and orally translated by V. Narayana Rao) in which a series of busy people who do not listen to an old woman's story about the sun-god are punished with ill-fortunes. The old woman's story, whose telling and hearing are considered auspicious (and mandatory) on a Sunday in the month of Māgha, finally finds an eager audience in the unborn girl child of a pregnant woman. For having heard the story, she is blessed with magical powers and great fortune by Ādinārāyaṇa, the sun-god, who himself comes to revive her dead husband, the king. The story eventually becomes a permanent tradition with tellers and hearers (Ramanujan 1991: 26–29).

Images, Countered And Connected

Discourse that marshals images of the ideal Indian woman and stipulates everyday behavior for women is significantly differentiated but pervasive. Religious scriptures, ancient epic narrative, nationalist moral tracts, sectarian code-books, colonial abstractions, and diasporic displays of community identity posit "the Indian woman" as the locus of the continuity of tradition as well as of the march of modernity. Much of this discourse centers not on the materiality and specificity of women's everyday lives but at best on generic imaginations of gendered experience, relying on typifications of "women's nature." For a long time, as archival records of essentialist projects of British colonial politics and Indian nationalism highlight, the "woman's question" was taken up not out of inherent interest in it, but because it was tactical or politically expedient to invoke. For example, the debates of a century ago about the practice of *satī* [immolation of a woman on her deceased husband's pyre] expose the complex and multiple political agendas of orthodox Hindu male supporters of the practice, of British colonial administrators, and of nationalist reformers of "Hindu tradition," agendas, most of which were not concerned with the materiality

of the burning bodies of women—and even less with the lived circumstances of their social lives (Mani 1998). In more immediate memory, Tanika Sarkar demonstrates that exclusionary Hindu and Muslim fundamentalist ideologies construct an immoral Otherness to augment political positions and make the treatment of women the essence of moral difference between the two communities (1998). Anand Patwardhan's documentary film, "The Hero Pharmacy" (1995), captures vividly the ways in which parochial political and popular street rhetoric incorporates chauvinistic imagery that accentuates the social privileging of masculinity. At the same time that one confronts such totalizing and sexist discourses in India, it is important to share the caution expressed by feminist scholars that culturally grounded gender inequities and economic asymmetries neither automatically confirm that women in so-called Third World countries are silent suffering subjects of male ideology nor do they automatically allocate representing agency to "Western" feminists (Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991).

Against contemporary political resurgence of "Hindu" ideologies that institute a language of exclusive fraternity with starkly defined gender roles, these essays take on added significance, joining other works that hold up textured vignettes of everyday life in South Asia (Srinivas 1976; Khare 1984; Trawick 1990; Kumar 1994; Wadley 1994; Mines and Lamb 2002). Women's songs and stories, persuasive and passionate, powerfully illustrate how authoritarian discourses are vulnerable to interruptions when narrative avenues provide for everyday forms of resistance (Scott 1990). The authors in this volume, in pointing our attention to the wide range of tones and themes evinced by the material they present, caution against "a romance of resistance," to borrow a phrase from Lila Abu-Lughod (1990). To elaborate, Abu-Lughod asks, "How might we develop theories that give these women credit for resisting in a variety of creative ways the power of those who control so much of their lives without either misattributing to them forms of consciousness or politics that are not part of their experience—something like a feminist consciousness or feminist politics—or devaluing their practices as prepolitical, primitive, or even misguided?" She concludes, "Yet it seems to me that we respect everyday resistance not just by arguing for the dignity or heroism of the resistors but by letting their practices teach us about the complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power" (1990: 55). Against this background, the essays in this volume bring together women's narratives from South India that propose normative worldviews that are thoroughly

embedded in the everyday detail of women's material and spiritual lives, lives in which love and fidelity are priorities, loyalties need not be polarized or compromised, injustices wrought can be avenged, and self-expression creates its own avenues against all odds.

Between narrators, narratives, everyday lives, and researchers, is a story of intimacies. Rājamma says to Kanaka Durga, "My girl, I do not know that all my tales are about women. . . . I have sympathy and concern for women and their problems. I myself faced many troubles as a lonely woman. I have to stand by the side of my family as if I were a man. So I have a soft corner for the women who suffer in the world of males. I tell such narratives and songs to the young girls and children in my leisure time or in the agricultural fields or while grazing the cattle to enlighten them about the nature of the world . . . I seek happiness in memorizing and perpetuating them among the womenfolk." Such intimacies are not only those formed out of mirror images, but also out of dreams and other realities. Lakshmi Narasamamba reflects, "I understand their stories as an ongoing rehearsal in their voice world that helps them to take options, and make choices, change social rules, and act according to these new rules within their groups." These reflections link women to other women across regions and histories without eliding their personal locations. I found myself remembering the explanation of Urmilaji, Kirin Narayan's storyteller-friend in the Kangra region: telling stories helped her understand suffering. Closing this introductory chapter, I realize I have consciously drawn on the words and lives of *many* women. I am also oddly drawn to a letter that my father wrote for my birthday many years ago, after I had left India to study in the United States, about how much I strongly resembled in temperament and looks his mother, who had died when he had been three years old. They had both been very ill with a raging fever. I am always tantalized by the "fact" that the anniversary of her death coincides with my birthday in the Hindu calendar. Family lore tells me a story that my father also recalled in his letter to me: ". . . My grandmother used to tell me that my mother prayed that she should go but her son should be spared, much to my grandmother's disgust who apparently said, 'Let the brat go but may you be spared!' 'No, my son should live,' was the desire of my mother and so it happened. So she sacrificed her life for me. So strong was her attachment to me that I daresay she waited to be reborn in my family. . . . Those who had seen my mother and those who are around now still and have seen you have remarked on the strong resemblance. . . . So this is your history. If you stretch your memory, you can recall your grandmother's life. . . ."

Appendix: Transliteration Of Songs Translated In The Essay

1. Telugu cradle song I recorded from Mrs. S. Nagarajan and Vijaya Shankar, 7 February, 2002, Hyderabad, and New Delhi.

Ululuuluulu-a hāyi
Hāyi hāyiga
Apadalu gāyi
Ululuuluulu-a hāyi

Āḍadi puṭṭindī hamsa puṭṭindī
Mogavāḍu puṭṭinaḍu mutyammu puṭṭinaḍu
Ululuuluulu-a hāyi
Eḍavāku eḍavāku veri nā talli
Ēḍiste nī kaḷḷo nīrāru kāru
Ululuuluulu-a hāyi

Eḍavāku eḍavāku veri nā talli
nī kaḷḷo nīrāru kārute nēnu chūḍalēnu
Ululuuluulu-a hāyi

Pālaina kārave baṅgāru kaḷḷu
Ululuuluulu-a hāyi

Būcivāḍa rā rā buṭṭalu-allukōni
Buṭṭalo unna pāpānu mākicci pōrā
Ululuuluulu-a hāyi

Hāyamma Bāyamma akka cellelu
Sridevī Bhudevī tōṭi kōḍallu
Ululuuluulu-a hāyi

Cinnāri Ponnāri Sri Lakṣmī rāve
Ādi Lakṣmī rāve amma to āḍa
Sri Rāma jaya Rāma śṛingara Rāma
Rāmēmi kāvalane rāghavula Sita
Ululuuluulu-a hāyi

Āḍapōye pilla vacceno ledo
Andāla cappuḍāya arugūla mīdā
Ululuuluulu-a hāyi

2. Tavaru mane hāḍu [song about the natal home] sung by Lalitāmba, itinerant folksinger from Hassan, Karnataka. Recorded in Sringeri, Karnataka, 14 April 1995, Lalitāmba.

Tavarinda kaḷisi nanna
maribēḍa aṇṇaiyya

Tāyi tande kāṇada tabbalī nāvaiyya

Aṇṇaiyya maribēda aṇṇaiyya

Ammānendu kariyālu yāridāre aṇṇaiyya
Tāyi tande bandu baḷaga bāḷinalli nīnayya

Ammānendu kariyālu yāridāre aṇṇaiyya
Tāyi tande bandu baḷaga bāḷinalli nīnayya

Bāḷinalli nanagāgi aḷabēda aṇṇaiyya
Bāḷinalli nanagāgi aḷabēda aṇṇaiyya

Muttaida tanavu bāḷinalli sākaiyya

Aṇṇaiyya maribēḍa aṇṇaiyya

Tavarinda kaḷisi nanna maribēḍa aṇṇaiyya
Tāyi tande kāṇada tabbalī nāvaiyya
Aṇṇaiyya nanna maribēḍa aṇṇaiyya

Maguvāgi iruvāga toṭṭilalli tūgide
Mātu bandu naḍedāga bikṣe bēḍi sākide
Kaṇṇilladavarinda kaṇkaṇa va kaṭṭisi
Kāṇada ūrige dāriyannu tōride

Aṇṇaiyya nanna maribēḍa aṇṇaiyya
Aṇṇaiyya maribēḍa aṇṇaiyya

Tavarinda kaḷisi nanna maribēda aṇṇaiyya
Tāyi tande kāṇada tabbalī nāvaiyya

Tāli kaṭṭida gaṇḍa devāru aṇṇaiyya
Muttaida tanavu bāḷinalli sākaiyya
Hiḍudu tanda hanṇavana inḍi malaguvāsi namagayya

Tavarūra dārige muḷḷāde aṇṇaiyya

Aṇṇaiyya, nanna maribēḍa aṇṇaiyya

Ī jaññmadalli koḍalu ēnirudu aṇṇaiyya?
Mundīna jaññmadalli tandeyāgu aṇṇaiyya
Maganāgi huṭṭi ninna ṛṇavannu tīrisini
Maganāgi huṭṭi ninna ṛṇavannu tīrisini

Aṇṇaiyya nanna maribēḍa aṇṇaiyya

Aṇṇaiyya nanna maribēḍa aṇṇaiyya

3. Kannada song on dimwit brother-in-law.

Kāśige hōda namma bāva
Kabbiṇada dōṇilī
Rāśi rāśi gange tarakke
Soḷḷe parde lī

O! tangi Yamuna dēvī yoḷā
Sanghā vāyitendu ubbi ubbi
Ganga devī ukki ukki
Bīsi bīsi dōṇi kukki
Bāva attaru bikki bikki!

Kāśige hōda namma bāva
Kabbiṇada dōṇilī
Rāśi rāśi gange tarakke
Soḷḷe parde lī

O! banḍe tāki dōṇi voḍedu
Soḷḷe parde bāvana baḍedū
Banḍe douḍa paṭṭege hoḍadu
Kāśi āse nāśavāgī

Mīse uḷḍiddu eśtō vāsi antā
Kāśi ninda bandaru bāva

Notes

1. See Appendix for transliteration of song-texts. For this song, see song Number 1.

2. Lalitha Handoo's essay is based on collections from various regions of India. Her fieldwork, however, which also informs the essay, is in Kashmir and Karnataka.

3. See also Usha Nilsson and Madhu Kishwar's articles on lived perceptions of Sītā in Richman, 2000.

4. Narayana Rao notes that he gathered non-brahman songs from published collections that do not mention the particular non-brahman caste of the singers.

5. For more on *akam* and *puṟam* as performance genres, see Ramanujan (1986).

6. Parthasarathy notes a variant folk legend, "Chandra's Revenge" recounted in Mary Frere's *Old Deccan Days* (1868).

7. "Sumaṅgali" is a term denoting the status of a woman who is considered auspicious because her husband is living. The status is contrasted to widowhood, a state considered depleted of auspiciousness.

8. Number 2 in Appendix.

9. The Kannada term, and a common cognate to many South Indian languages, for "sumaṅgali." See note 7 above.

10. Two small gold or metallic disks strung together with black beads in a necklace worn by married Hindu women, signifying her *muttaide* status.

11. The now-dated practice of naming a girl "sākamma" or a boy "sākaiyya" comes from the hope that one could stop whatever affliction had been striking earlier children in the family. "Sāku" is the word for "enough."

12. These essays were first presented at the XIth Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) in Mysore, India (January 1995).

13. For how performance-based approaches to the study of narrative have helped widen the meaning of "context," see, for example, Bauman 1976; Degh 1969; 1978; Dwyer 1978; Pentikainen 1978; Tedlock 1983.

14. See also Juha Pentikäinen's 1978 *Oral Repertoire and World View.*

15. This story in Lakshmi Narasamba's collection is strikingly similar to Joyce Flueckiger's recounting of the oral epic of Lorik Canda, whose cultural significance is remarkably different even in neighboring regions of Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh—the Chhattisgarhi epic depicts female characters as prime movers of action, not because of their chastity, but because of their resourcefulness (Flueckiger 1989).

16. See Number 3 in Appendix.

17. The Kashi yātre [pilgrimage to Kashi] is a customary part of South Indian weddings, during which the groom pretends to abandon the wedding and seek sannyāsa or renunciation in Kashi (Varanasi in North India), the famous Hindu pilgrimage site. The groom is "persuaded" by the bride's father or by her brother that married life is superior to ascetic life, and that together, the bride and groom can meet the challenges of life. The groom "turns back" and the marriage ceremonies are resumed.

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2

The Son-in-law Story: Gender and Genre

LALITA HANDOO

Stupid son-in-law stories (ATU 1332, 1687, 1691[1]), a subgenre of numskull tales, are a significant genre in Indian narrative tradition and an important part of the oral tale repertoire of India. This subgenre cuts across regional, social, linguistic, and ethnic barriers. Unlike fairy tales, epics, and legends, this group of tales has not received the attention it deserves from folklore scholars. Investigations of its generic qualities, such as its relationship with jokes, legends, anecdotes, humorous, and trickster tales are necessary, as are studies of the origin, the functional aspects, and the instructional value of this important form of oral narrative. Confusion about the genre boundaries of stupid son-in-law stories is evident in Aarne-Thompson's index itself. There trickster tales and other humorous anecdotes are listed under "Numskull Stories" and "The Stupid Man Stories" despite the fact that numskulls and tricksters represent different worlds: in one, the protagonist is stupid, in the other, he is superintelligent (if negatively so). Nonetheless, stupid and trickster characteristics occasionally overlap in some numskull tales, especially in Indian numskull tales.

The barriers—culturally specific or purely symbolic—between the normal and the numskull world can be classified as spatial, socioethnic, and attitudinal or behavioral (Handoo 1983: 253–262). Spatial barriers between the normal and the numskull worlds in oral narratives are sometimes drawn with geographical specificity, with well-defined locations, such as Gotham in England, Chelm in Poland, Poshekhon in Russia, or Schilda in Germany. In India, each cultural region has one or more well-defined

geographical locations inhabited by "stupids": Bhainswāla [a locality of shepherds] in Haryana, Shikarpur in Punjab, Bhogaon [a cow-village] in Uttar Pradesh, Kattazham in Kerala, Baro in Bihar, Alur and Tippanampatti in Tamilnadu, and Moira in Goa. Undefined geographical locations also exist, but they bear symbolic names like Tsotalahoom [asshole locality] in Kashmir and Pedagaon in Maharashtra. And finally there are anonymous numskull settlements symbolized by and represented by nonurban populations, such as villagers, peasants, and shepherds, where socioethnic barriers are drawn between different social groups on the basis of socioeconomic status and group customs.

Stupid tales are always told about "others," whose otherness may be defined in geographical, ethnic, social or kinship-related terms. In the absence of spatial and ethnic characteristics, stupid individuals or characters are identified within the narrating society itself at the levels of family and kinship by factors such as age, gender, and social hierarchies. In India, for example, age and experience often symbolize wisdom, and old people are always believed to be wiser. This attitude, also validated in narratives, regularly produces expressions such as the "old wise men of the village." In numskull tales particularly, stupidity is almost always attributed to younger people, such as a stupid offspring of normal parents, and in terms of gender, stupidity is associated with a stupid boy, a numskull spouse—generally the male spouse, or a stupid son-in-law. It is interesting to note that many Indian numskull tales, particularly the tales from Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, present fine examples of tales in which numskulls are characterized as males, such as stupid peasants, weavers, boys, husbands, and—of course—stupid sons-in-law. However, some stupid daughter-in-law tales of the "Literal Fool" type are reported from Tamilnadu, which may be indicative of the different kinship system and social attitudes of the people of this region.

Despite the son-in-law's high social status in the Indian kinship system, the popularity of stupid son-in-law tales in India indicates the sensitive attitudinal state of both the son-in-law and the narrating society that identifies itself with the girl's family and probably with the female sex as a whole. The Sanskrit *jāmāto daśamo griha* [the son-in-law is the tenth planet] and its vernacular equivalents give the son-in-law the status of the tenth planet, which needs to be propitiated every now and then for one's well-being.[2] Other equivalents of this expression are Kannada *aḷiyā manē toḷiya* [the son-in-law washes away (the wealth of) the house] and the Kashmiri *zamtur gav turun kajawath* [son-in-law is a cold pestle that

needs to be warmed up every now and then]. The son-in-law's superior position in his wife's parental home, where his numskull behavior surfaces, is culturally assigned. And it is this symbolically superior position that makes his actions seem even more ludicrous.

Here I shall approach Indian "stupid son-in-law" tales from a gendered perspective to examine their main characteristics, their distribution, and their narrative structure. The stories I present here are from my fieldwork in Kashmir and from the Mysore region of Karnataka, but I also draw on collections made by other reseachers from various other regions of India. These tales not only reflect the constitution of the gendered nature of social life in India, but also seem to strongly express a "counter system" as an element of female narrative. A. K. Ramanujan identified some narratives as "women's tales" and defined them as "such tales whose protagonists are women—tales about mothers and daughters, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, wives and concubines, fathers and daughters" (Ramanujan 1994: 34). Most of these tales detail the sufferings of women at the hands of others, whether male or female. Although women seem to have tacitly accepted their assigned image as the "weaker sex," the "oppressed," and bearers of suffering and humiliation in the name of *karma* [destiny], they also seem to have, from time to time, used humor and subversion to attack stereotypes of male wisdom and superiority, most evident in stories about stupid boys and stupid sons-in-law. Another expressive form employed by Indian women to break the stereotype of male hegemony is the genre of the *Sithne gīt*, songs sung as a part of the marriage ritual all over India. While it is priests who recite the Vedic hymns at marriage ceremonies, it is women who generally sing folksongs including the *Sithne gīt*.

In a Hindu wedding, the groom's party is treated with great respect and hospitality on its arrival at the girl's parents' home. The women, in groups, welcome the groom's party by singing humorous songs in which the bridegroom is depicted as a fool, a buffoon, an ugly, dull, or bull-headed man, or an animal such as a bull or a monkey. These songs also ridicule the bridegroom's relatives by abusing them and thus symbolically inverting their roles and attributes. From a psychoanalytical point of view, it is interesting to note that these songs might be helpful in reducing or diffusing the tension inherent in the oppositions between the natal and the conjugal families, displacement of the females, gender discrimination, and the resultant harassment that seems to be concealed in the institution of marriage itself. One can notice this kind of inversion or role reversal in

normal discourse as well. The verbal abuse in phrases such as *mard adat-sot* (Kashmiri), *mard mua* or *mua mard* (Hindi, Punjabi)—which mean "death to the male" or "dead male"—seem to emphasize the same point. It is interesting to note that females do not use these verbal abuses as expressions of protest in male contexts, but rather in female contexts, and in conditions of uncertainty.

Although the protagonists in stupid son-in-law tales are always males, these tales seem to be the creation of a female fantasy that rejects male hegemony, at least temporarily. In so doing, such fantasy characterizes the son-in-law as a stupid, ignorant, illogical person, who is unable to understand simple kinship relations, nondeductive logic and its application, or even commonsense social behavior.

In my fieldwork, I found that stupid son-in-law tales are told primarily by women in domestic settings to a group of women, which may also occasionally include children of both sexes. Sometimes, I found that a tale was reproduced as an allegory by a male either in a private or a public setting. However, depending on the content of the tales, the gathering may consist exclusively of women when the social context encourages sharing of humorously obscene and bawdy stupid son-in-law tales. Under these conditions, depictions of a son-in-law's ignorance of sexual behavior, his minimal sexual prowess, or his fear of female sexuality abound. Such stories seem to reflect narrators' strong resentment of gender inequities in Indian society, and occasionally they suggest symbolic castration of the stupid male hero. Some of these tales, including the one of the illiterate son-in-law, who due to his stupidity makes his mother-in-law and her family believe that his father-in-law is dead, seem to suggest the presence of a kind of Oedipus complex in the deep structure of these tales (Handoo 1983, 1988a, 1994). Variants of such tales are prevalent in several regions of India such as Karnataka, Goa, Assam, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Pondicherry. The regional culture shapes the particularities of the tale determining, for example, the kinds of foods or the geographical details mentioned in the tale. There is a clear difference between fairy tales and "Stupid Man Tales" (ATU 1675–1724), particularly stupid son-in-law tales: while fairy tales end with happy weddings and kingdoms, stupid son-in-law tales begin with marriages and continue with the sociocultural and behavioral problems that follow. That these tales reflect the nature of gendered power relations in Indian society hardly needs to be emphasized.

Stupid son-in-law tales, like other stupid tale types, are highly structured. In Proppian terms, these tales seem to be task-task resolved types, with a set of five functions: (1) task, (2) reaction, (3) contrary result, (4) mediation, and (5) positive result/task resolved (Handoo 1983, 1994). The hero of these tales is assigned a job or is given some instructions or advice in conformity with his new role as a son-in-law (task). The hero follows the instructions literally (reaction) and makes a fool of himself (contrary result). His wife or mother-in-law tries to mediate, but the stupid hero's behavior continues to show an inappropriate application of rules of inference. The hero becomes a fool by misunderstanding advice or instructions, or by applying advice and instructions in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and in a wrong context. His actions bring about incorrect or contrary results that disturb the social equilibrium and invariably defeat the main purpose for which the instructions were designed. Examples of this kind of tale together with their documented occurrences demonstrate the widespread distribution of stupid son-in-law tales in India.

Tale Number 1

"You know there was this young boy who was recently married. As per the custom, he was to visit his in-laws for the 'first invitation.' He wore new clothes[3] and got ready to go to his in-laws' house. When he was ready to leave, his mother told him, 'When you go to your in-laws' house you should sit *thazaras* [at a higher place] and talk heavy stuff (serious matters), and do not make a fool of yourself. Do not forget that you are the son-in-law of that house.' The young boy replied, 'Do not worry, I will do exactly what you want me to do.' Thus, he left home to go to his mother-in-law's house. When he reached his in-laws' place, as was expected, he was received with great respect and led to the finely decorated room. When he was about to enter the room, he remembered his mother's advice and his eyes started looking for the highest place. He ran in and jumped up and sat on the top of the *almirah* [steel cupboard] that was kept in the room. Now, the in-laws had invited many more people for a feast in his honor and to introduce their son-in-law to their friends and relations. They were all shocked to see his unusual behavior. They pleaded with him to come down and occupy the respectable seat arranged and decorated for him. But he would not budge. 'Please come down

and take your seat,' said the mother-in-law. Remembering his mother's advice to talk heavy stuff, he said, 'Pestle.' 'Oh, what are you talking about?' asked the frightened mother-in-law. 'Mortar,' said the son-in-law. 'Oh, my god, what has happened to him?' moaned the mother-in-law. 'A grinding stone,' said the son-in-law. Hearing this, the mother-in-law almost fainted and said, 'What has befallen my daughter! He seems to be possessed by some evil spirit.' The relatives and friends assembled there laughed at the stupidity of the son-in-law." (ATU 1685, Kashmir. Author's personal collection [APC]. For versions from Kerala, see Jacob 1972: 52–53. For versions from Goa, see Rodrigues 1974:172–175)

Tale Number 2

"There was once a son-in-law who was illiterate. His parents had sent him to the parish school when he was young, but instead of learning to read and write and sing, he had only learnt to climb coconut palm trees and knock down tender nuts, roast cashew nuts on the hills, catch birds with lime, and sundry other acts which had made him the leader of truants. It was only before his marriage that he had assiduously practised his signature so that he could sign the marriage register. His education, however, had been taken for granted by the mother-in-law.

Soon after his marriage he went to the house of his wife. The father-in-law was away on a voyage. One day, the postman brought a letter addressed to the mother-in-law, who immediately asked her daughter to have it read by the son-in-law. She was anxious about the health of her husband, for in the previous letter he had written that he had been ill. The mother-in-law stood at the door of the hall, holding the *palou* [decorative end] of her sari tightly over her shoulder, and covering her face with the edge. The son-in-law who was sitting in the hall opened the letter and stared at the sheet. He could decipher a few alphabets but the letter remained a mystery.

He stared and stared in silence while his wife and mother-in-law waited for the news.

'I hope there is no bad news,' said the mother-in-law, half to herself.

'He will read it to you after he has read it himself,' said the daughter.

The son-in-law stared at the written matter and a deep sense of regret at having wasted his school days in truancy overcame him. To confess his ignorance before his mother-in-law was the utmost disgrace. A sense of terrible shame filled him and tears welled in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

His wife watched him with deep concern. 'Is there anything wrong?' she asked. 'It must be some bad news,' the mother-in-law said. This was too much for the son-in-law to bear. He could not control himself and burst forth into sobs.

This was a signal for the mother-in-law to take alarm. It was sure news of death, her husband's, certainly. She let out a scream of grief and rushed inside and began to mourn aloud. The daughter followed her and joined in the wailing and soon the whole household took up the refrain. The neighbours came to offer their condolences and wiped their eyes in sympathy. It was a house of mourning.

The son-in-law still held the letter in his hand and sobbed away in the hall, where he was left alone, a very picture of distress, as all the people crowded round the mother-in-law. It was only when a school-going village youngster approached him that he asked him to read the letter.

'Grandfather is coming home tomorrow!' exclaimed the innocent lad, and rushed to the scene of mourning, holding the letter triumphantly in his hand and proclaiming to the mourning assembly the glad news. 'He says he is arriving tomorrow!' the boy chirped with delight. 'Grandmother, he is fine, he says.'

The mother-in-law wiped her tears, and all the neighbours felt greatly relieved. It was some time before the son-in-law could get over his embarrassment." (Rodrigues 1974:175–176)

Tale Number 3

"The elderly in-laws were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their son-in-law. Their daughter had already arrived . . . She informed her parents that her husband was too busy to accompany her and that he would positively come a day before the Deepavali festival.

It was customary for the bridegroom to celebrate his first year of Deepavali after marriage in his parents-in-law's house. The father-in-law, however poor he might be, was expected to present the couple with costly clothes and jewels as Deepavali dowry. As regards food, the mother-in-law would prepare some very tempting dishes.

A few hours before the day of Deepavali the son-in-law arrived. The younger in-laws welcomed him with shouts of joy and the elders with a smile. His wife was the happiest of all. Everyone enjoyed his company.

The mother-in-law disappeared into the kitchen. She had to prepare the Deepavali special dish, the other items on the menu having been prepared earlier.

A couple of days back she had paid a heavy price for a peacock. Since peacock meat is the softest, she wanted it to be served specially to her son-in-law.

The cooking was over. All the dishes were displayed. It was then offered to the statues of the gods. The camphor was lit and everyone prayed in silence.

When the camphor had burnt and the flame had gone out, all of them sat in a row while the mother-in-law served the food.

Finding something strange in one corner of the plantain leaf the bridegroom asked his wife: 'What is that dish?'

'Peacock meat,' she replied.

'What?' he raised his voice.

'Peacock meat . . . finely prepared . . . my mother is an excellent cook, you know.'

'Who doubts it? But do you eat peacock meat?'

'Whenever it is available to us . . . It's a very costly bird.'

'But I don't eat it.'

The mother-in-law who heard their conversation interrupted and said, 'Peacock meat is the tastiest of all bird meat. Please taste just a little piece. I am sure you will like it.'

The father-in-law too spoke. But the son-in-law refused and said, 'I have never tasted peacock meat nor do I intend to do it now.'

The mother-in-law was disappointed. Had she known her son-in-law's allergy to peacock meat earlier, she would not have paid such a high price for a peacock.

However, the son-in-law was pleased with the other items. He congratulated his mother-in-law on her tasty preparations.

'But they are nothing compared to the tasty peacock meat,' said the father-in-law.

'We are privileged people to taste peacock meat,' said one.

'Well! We are certainly lucky enough . . . oh! What a fine dish!' applauded another.

'Deepavali comes but once a year,' said his wife.

The son-in-law felt that the others were trying to tease him. He didn't want to hear any more. He quickly finished his meal.

The festival of Deepavali was bid good-bye by firing crackers.

Too much of eating and rejoicing made everyone go to bed early. Soon they were all fast asleep.

At midnight, the mother-in-law was awakened by some noise from the kitchen. At first she thought that it must be a cat or a rat and tried to sleep. But when the noise did not stop, she had her own doubts.

A hurricane lamp in one hand and a raised walking stick in the other, she tip-toed towards the kitchen.

To her great surprise she saw there her son-in-law struggling to release his head from inside the earthen vessel in which she had cooked the peacock meat.

It didn't take much time for her to guess what had happened. At first she pitied him. But the next moment she laughed.

The son-in-law stood still. 'Please help me,' he requested in a pitiable tone. The mother-in-law gave a sharp tap on the pot and broke it.

He heaved a sigh of relief. He was embarrassed to see her. With a bent head he confessed: 'Since everyone said that peacock meat tasted so nice I felt like eating it. But since I had refused when you offered it to me I felt shy of asking you, and so chose this midnight hour . . . But when I came here, I found not a piece of meat left in the vessel . . . But the smell was so enticing, you see, I tried to lick the inside of the pot. But in my venture my head got caught in the pot.'

The mother-in-law heard him in silence.

'Please,' he continued, 'let it not be known to the others. They will make fun of me. Please do not betray me.'

She nodded approvingly and went back to her bed.

The next day at dinner everyone was surprised to find peacock meat again. But the surprise turned into wonder, when they noticed the son-in-law eating peacock meat with an unruffled calm. They all winked at each other.

No one told them what made the son-in-law change his mind overnight." (Raja 1987: 54–57).

This tale ATU 1,691, 1,685A has also been documented in Goa (Rodrigues 1974: 176–178), Assam (Goswami 1980: 138–141), Bihar (Chaudhury 1968: 34–35), and Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka (APC). In a version from Tamilnadu, when the mother-in-law finds the son-in-law with his head in the pot she says in disgust, "Let his head break, but let him not break my precious pot."

Tale Number 4

"A son-in-law was invited to his mother-in-law's house for a feast. The mother-in-law made several delicious dishes for him. Among these dishes was *kaḍabu* (a sweet dumpling). The son-in-law loved it and ate three, four, then five portions. Then he asked his mother-in-law for the name of this sweet. She said, 'This is *'kaḍabu.'* The son-in-law returned home soon after, muttering the word '*kaḍabu*' lest he forget. By the time he reached home he had unwittingly reversed *'kaḍabu'* to *'budaka.'* Soon after he reached his home, he told his wife how nice a cook her mother was and asked her to prepare *'budaka.'* She said, 'What the hell is *'budaka?'* I have never heard of anything like that before, and I do not know how to cook it.' The husband kept on saying how his mother-in-law had prepared a nice sweet dish, but the wife would not understand. Then he became angry and beat her. The wife cried and cried, her face swollen with beatings she muttered to herself, 'You beat me so mercilessly, my face is swollen like a *'kaḍabu.'* 'That is it! I want you to make *'kaḍabu,'* shouted the husband. The poor wife understood that he had unwittingly changed *'kaḍabu'* into *'budaka,'* but what could she do, poor thing." (ATU 1,687, Kannada tale, APC).

Versions of this tale exist in Goa (Rodrigues 1974: 178–179), Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh (APC).

Tale Number 5

"Once in olden times, it is told, there lived in a certain village a certain man's son-in-law. One day, they say, he had gone alone to visit his father-in-law and mother-in-law in their home. While there his mother-in-law was engaged in cooking curry and rice, and at the same time she kept up a conversation with him. In this way the evening fell.

Now the old woman had prepared some bamboo shoots as curry; when she had done cooking, she poured out some water for him to wash his hands ere sitting down to eat, and placed a stool for him near the door. When he had washed his hands and come in again, he sat down on the stool, and she brought him the curry and rice. Whilst eating the son-in-law thought it was meat curry he had; but he did not find any lumps.

So he asked his mother-in-law, 'I say, mother, what kind of curry have you prepared? I cannot make out exactly what it is.' Now there was the bamboo door at the back of the son-in-law.

So the old woman said, 'Look there what is at the back of you, my son-in-law, that is what I have made into curry for you.'

So the son-in-law turned round and saw it was a bamboo door; but looking he kept quiet and said nothing; and the old woman too said thus much and nothing more.

The son-in-law, however, thought in his mind: I find this curry perfectly delicious; when every one is asleep presently, I shall walk off with this door. This he made up his mind to do so.

True enough, when all had done eating, they retired for the night, and when every one had fallen asleep, he got up quietly and loosened the door, and that very night he took their door on his back and walked off with it, nobody being aware of it at the time the deed was done.

When they awoke at cockcrow in the morning and looked about, there was no door to be seen; and when they called out for the son-in-law, there was no answer. So they said: 'Look and see if he is there or not; he doesn't answer.' They looked about for him, but he was not there.

Then the old woman suddenly burst out into a loud laugh, whereupon her daughters said to her: 'Why, mother, what are you laughing so heartily at?'

Then the old woman said to them: "Your elder sister's husband, girls, has most assuredly decamped with this door. Yesterday. I made him a curry of bamboo shoots, and he asked me, 'I say mother, what kind of curry have you prepared? I cannot make out exactly what it is.' Whereupon I said to him: 'Look there what is to the back of you, my son-in-law, that is what I have made into curry for you.' Perhaps that is why your elder sister's husband has carried off the door."

When she told them this, every one laughed very much and said: 'This brother-in-law is dreadfully stupid.'

True enough, when the stupid fellow had walked off with the door, he took the whole thing to pieces and chopped all of it into small bits. Then he told his wife, 'Make this into curry to-day, please.'

She replied: 'How am I to make a curry of this? Will this dry bamboo taste well? Not a bit of it. You are very stupid.'

He replied: 'Not so, it is simply delicious. Yesterday I went to see your mother and the others there; then she made me some curry of this; you may not believe it, but I tell you, it tasted to me just like meat curry; and that is why I made off with this door of theirs, for they would not give it to me.'

His wife said: 'Who is then going to eat this dry stuff, that you want me to make curry of it?'

To which he replied: 'All right, if you other people won't eat it, make some curry of it for me.'

So, as he would not listen to her, she sure enough made him some curry of it and gave it to him along with some boiled rice. Then he poured some of the gravy on it, and mixing it together with his hand he took a mouthfull, and all the while his wife was watching him closely. But as the rice and gravy did not taste particularly nice, he laid hold of a lump of the curry and gave it a bite; when he was unable even to bite a piece off, his wife, no longer able to restrain her mirth, burst into a loud laugh, in which he himself also joined.

Then he said, 'What kind of a curry have you turned out? You have not succeeded, and therefore it is not savoury. How is it you have not dissolved this piece? Mother dissolved altogether every piece in the curry she gave me; I could not find a single lump in it, whereas you have given me nothing but lumps; you have got it in lumps just the same as when I cut them up; you have not dissolved them one bit.'

Then his wife said, 'I am not acquainted with this curry; you had better cook some for yourself.'

And true enough, when he had cooked some for himself too, he could not get it to dissolve. Whereupon they had a good laugh at him. From that day forward he got the surname of 'Stupid,' and by addressing him thus every time they met him they teased him well.

That is the end of the tale; it is so much." (Bodding 1990 [1925–1929]: vol. 2, 27–33)

Tale Number 6

"Old Mariam was a wise woman, but she was worried about her son, Thoma. The trouble with him was that he would be silent when he ought to say at least a few words. But Thoma was very timid, and afraid that he would say the wrong thing.

The young man was about to go to his wife's house for the first time. If he didn't say anything to anyone there, what would they think? So his mother told him, 'Look here my boy, you should not keep very silent at your wife's house. You must say something to your father-in-law at least.'

'What can I say, mother?' he asked.

'Oh, ask him something in which he would be interested. You can think of something, can you not?' asked she.

'Oh yes, I will do that, never fear,' said Thoma.

When he reached his father-in-law's place, he was welcomed with great affection and respect. The arrival of a son-in-law is a great event in a Malayali home. A very fine meal was prepared for him, and they all sat together for lunch.

All this time, the young man was thinking of a suitable subject to talk about. Of course, he did answer the questions which were put to him. But he wanted to put some questions himself to the old man. At last he found a subject that could not fail to grip.

'Father, are you married?' he asked.

Wise people say that speech is silver, but silence is golden. But could we say that the son-in-law's words were as valuable as silver? No doubt his wife's people, by those words, were able to judge the worth of the treasure they had secured." (Jacob 1972: 60–61)

Tale Number 7

"Sheikhji had not visited his mother-in-law's place for quite some time. Then came his mother-in-law's letter inviting him. Therefore his mother wanted him to comply with his in-laws' wishes and go to visit his mother-in-law. He agreed and got ready to leave. It was at that time that the mother gave him some advice, she said, "Remember, son, when you are in your in-laws' place, be humble and accept everything they give you gladly.[4] Sheikhji nodded his head in affirmation and left home.

On his arrival there he was received with great respect befitting a son-in-law. Then it was dinnertime, and a lavish dinner was served. His mother-in-law served the food, but to every dish, one by one, he would say, 'No.' Then came curries, and his answer was again, 'No, no.'

Finally the mother-in-law pleaded, and Sheikh Chilli remembered his mother's advice. He held the bowl in his hand and poured the hot curries right over his head! The relatives present there were all aghast but Sheikh Chilli explained, 'My mother told me to accept everything *'sar mathe pe'* [see footnote 4]." (Rajasthan, APC)

This tale is very popular in the entire Hindi region including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar, and is an important theme in the Sheikh Chilli cycle of stupid tales.

Tale Number 8

"One day a man had to visit his mother-in-law. When he was about to leave, his wife said, 'Take something for your mother-in-law.' The man agreed and on his way bought butter, put it in his cap, and placing the cap on his head, and proceeded to his mother-in-law's house. By the time he reached his in-laws' house, the butter had melted over his head and his face and he looked miserable. When he told this to his wife, she said, 'Butter should have been carried in a container. Anyway now take a small puppy for her.' He was impressed by his wife's wisdom and bought a puppy, put it in a container, closed it, and carried it to his mother-in-law's place. When he arrived there, he handed over the container to his mother-in-law. She opened it and found a dead puppy in it. The puppy was suffocated to death. 'What kind of ugly joke is this?' said she. He

explained and his mistake was discovered. His wife was angry and shouted at him, 'You should have tied it with a rope and carried it.' Next the man decided to make up for his mistakes and bought a *jilēbi* [a deep-fried sweet] for his mother-in-law. Pleased, he tied it with a rope and dragged it behind him to his mother-in-law's house. On his arrival there, he wanted to untie the *jilēbi* to present to his mother-in-law. There was no *jilēbi*, only the rope. He was ridiculed for his stupidity." (ATU 1,696, Maharashtra, APC)

This tale is also reported from Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.

Tale Number 9

"Once a boy asked his mother, 'Mother, all my friends are married, why do you not get me a wife, too?' The mother said, 'Son, you were married when you were very young. Your wife lives in that village across the river. Go and get her.' The boy agreed to go. An auspicious day was fixed for him to go and on that day he left for his in-laws' house to fetch his bride. He walked a lot before he reached the village. His mother had already sent a message to his in-laws to send the bride with him. When he reached there he was received very well. As the custom demanded he stayed there for two to three days. Then on the day of his departure, they dressed up the bride with new clothes and jewelry and decorated her hands and feet with *alta* [a red pigment]. She looked beautiful. The *alta* on her feet was beautiful and the boy was impressed with it. Mother-in-law saw them off and with tears in her eyes she said, 'Take her carefully and take good care of her.' Soon after the boy left his mother-in-law's house and set off towards his home. He and his new wife walked a lot and reached a river. It had to be crossed to reach his village. He remembered his mother-in-law's request and did not want the *alta* on his bride's feet to be washed away. Therefore, he thought of a plan and carried her on his shoulder with her feet in the air to keep them dry and her head downwards. By the time he had crossed the river and reached the other side the bride was dead." (ATU 1,293B, Bihar and Santhal area. APC)

In stupid person tales, the hero's stupidity becomes apparent when he leaves his own domain and enters some other domain or when he

changes one domain for another, such as going from his village to a city, from his home to a marketplace, or from inside the home to outside. Similarly, in stupid son-in-law tales, the hero's stupid behavior also surfaces when he is in a situation that connotes "otherness," for example, when he is in his in-laws' house, and when he is confronted with the opposite sex (his mother-in-law, his sister-in-law, or his wife). There seems to be a continuous comparison and contrast between the intelligence, wit, pluck, and behavior of the two sexes throughout these tales. For example, the protagonist fails to understand his mother's advice or instructions and also misunderstands his mother-in-law's behavior or her message.

Generally, these tales show only the first three Proppian functions: task, reaction, and contrary result, and lack mediation and positive result/task resolved. They conclude with negative results. In a few tales, a series of stupid acts and negative results are followed by a series of freak accidents that allow the hero to emerge victorious, as in the following tale.

Tale Number 10

"Once a son-in-law was going to his mother-in-law's place for the first time after his marriage. His mother advised him not to eat in a clumsy and greedy manner in his in-laws' house and to refuse everything he was offered. He left home, and when he arrived at his in-laws' place, everybody, especially the mother-in-law, was excited to welcome the son-in-law. She prepared delicious food for him. As the practice is, she offered him her specialty *kākvi*.[5] The son-in-law refused to eat, saying 'No' to her. When he saw everybody else eating and enjoying the dish, he felt sorry but didn't want to contradict himself. So he waited till it was dark and everybody went to sleep. When everyone in the house was sleeping, he got up and went to the kitchen looking for *kākvi*. There he found the *kākvi* pot hung on a hook in the ceiling, which was too high for him to reach. As he tried to knock a small hole in the pot with a stick, the pot broke and its contents fell over him. He was covered with molasses, his head, face, body, everything. Now, when the pot broke it made a sound that woke up the mother-in-law. Thinking that a thief had broken into the house, she shouted for help. Hearing this the son-in-law ran out of the kitchen to the adjacent storeroom where bales of cotton wool were piled up. While hiding himself in those bales, cotton wool got stuck to the

molasses on his head and body. Hearing the commotion in the storeroom, everyone in the house went into the storeroom looking for the thief. At this point the son-in-law ran into the cattle shed and hid himself among the sheep. In the meantime, everybody began to look for the son-in-law, couldn't find him, and began to worry. The son-in-law wanted to tell them that he was there, but how could he, with such a messy appearance? He had to spend the night in the cattle shed. The same night, two real thieves came to the cattle shed to steal sheep. They picked up the fattest of them all, and that was the son-in-law covered with cotton wool, looking like a sheep! The thieves tied him in a sack and carried him off. Eventually, they got tired and put the sack down under a tree where they wanted to rest a while. When they put the sack down, the son-in-law groaned from within, 'Ah! You hurt me!' The thieves thought that it was a ghost and ran away leaving the supposed sheep there. After they had gone, the son-in-law got out of the sack and went home, telling everybody how he had heard the thieves break into the house and had chased them through the storeroom out of the house." (Maharashtra, APC)

Variants of this tale can be found in Uttar Pradesh (Bahadur 1972: 89–90) and Assam (Goswami 1980: 138–141). In the above tale we encounter a form of mediation: the task is completed as the hero is absolved of his stupidity and as his status and respectability are restored. This tale has all five Proppian functions and ends with the task being successfully resolved. The process of mediation in these tales is significant for several reasons. First, the son-in-law (re)gains his status by accident, not by his valor or by his wisdom. Second, the son-in-law who commands respectable status in actual Indian kinship systems is equated in the narrative system with a person of low status (thief) and an animal (a filthy sheep), with the latter triumphing over the former (son-in-law). These tales present an interesting phenomenon. As in other numskull tales, a kind of role reversal in the usual dichotomies (normal versus nonnormal, wise versus foolish, ordinary versus extraordinary) is suggested, by which a man of high status (a wise man or an extraordinarily important person who holds the highest status in the kinship system), is equated with an ordinary person of low status. During the son-in-law's journey from home to his mother-in-law's house, he undergoes a chain of transformations both human and nonhuman and living and dead. From a normal being, he is transformed into a nonnormal being, that

is, into a stupid person who is a misfit in the normal world. While some tales end with simple mockery of the son-in-law's stupidity, others go far beyond laughter and acrimoniously deposit the hero in the cattle shed among the animals. Thus condemned, he is equated with furry, feathered, or filthy animals. He is also forced to undergo the degradation of being or appearing to be a nonbeing such as a ghost or spirit, before he resumes his original status. These transformations seem to symbolize a rebirth of the son-in-law as hero. These and other important semiotic characteristics of this narrative genre have not yet been investigated thoroughly. I believe that an analysis of the son-in-law tale genre can contribute to an understanding of the semiotics of gender bias in Indian society.

Notes

1. ATU refers to the updated Aarne/Thompson classification and bibliography of folktales. See Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales. A Classification and Bibliography* (= *Folklore Fellows Communications* 284, 2004).

2. Indians in general and Hindus in particular strongly believe in good and bad effects of planetary configurations and their positioning on the lives of all living beings. Therefore, to avert their bad and adverse effects, *Navagrihas* [the nine planets] are worshiped and propitiated both in big and small temples exclusively meant for them, and in homes as well. *Navagriha* worship is a common feature of Indian society and cuts across regional barriers.

3. The idiomatic expression in Kashmiri is "*nov suuth-booth*," which literally translated to "new suit-boot."

4. The Hindi expression used is "*sar māthe pe swīkar karna*," which literally means "accept on your head and forehead," that is, "accept everything unquestioningly."

5. A sweet dish made of molasses.

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ATU. See note 1.

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3

The Role of Gender in Tale-Telling Events

SARASWATHI VENUGOPAL

Gender plays a critical role in tale telling events in India, where performance presupposes gender distinctions that reflect social structures and kinship norms. In earlier work, I used the "contextual theory of meaning" developed by Raymond Firth, who defines meaning as ". . . a complex of contextual relations, and phonetics, grammar, lexicology, and semantics . . ." (quoted in Lyons 1977: 609). Further, as John Lyons explains, "Every utterance occurs in a culturally determined context-of-situation; and the meaning of the utterance is the totality of its contribution to the maintenance of what Firth here refers to as the patterns of life in the society in which the speaker lives and to the affirmation of the speaker's role and personality within the society" (Lyons 1977: 607). In my earlier work (Venugopal 1992), I showed how the texture and text of a particular tale (Dundes 1980) told by a particular person depended on context, and how both texture and text vary in tellings of the same tale in different contexts. The principal differences between the two contexts were determined by gender.

Drawing on two structured tale-telling events, this essay seeks to draw attention to the responses of audience members in the two events that took place in what I provisionally call "rural" and "urban" settings. My specific question when I undertook this study was whether "rural" or "urban" locations had an impact on responses made by listeners, especially by women in these locations. If the "rural" or "urban" location of the telling made a difference, then how was gender implicated? The storytellers and the listeners whose tales and responses are discussed here were all native speakers of Tamil. The rural setting was characterized by its location in a village, by the relatively

low level of formal school education of the storyteller and the audience, by the lower economic class of the participants, and by an inability to afford modern facilities. The urban context, on the other hand, was city based, with participants from the upper-middle class, who had in some cases postgraduate education, and who could afford modern amenities. While my fieldwork material in this essay does not allow for conclusive insights or for generalizations about "Indian" or "Tamil" or even about the members of the audience in these events, it highlights the importance of tracking audience responses in narrative events across gender lines that could intersect other social and geographic "locations" in more extensive and detailed studies of folk narrative. That listeners' engagement actively contributes to both the telling and the interpretation of oral narrative is today recognized as pivotal to understanding a narrative event (Dundes 1966; Narayan 1989; Mills 1991).

The narrator in the rural setting, Krishnan, was a sixty-five-year-old Hindu man, a farmer from the Yādava caste who lived in the village of Uttumalai in Tirunelveli district in southern Tamilnadu. Although he had no formal education, he was a versatile storyteller. The four persons who formed the small listening group were also Hindus from the Yādava caste, resided in Uttumalai like Krishnan the storyteller, and had middle- to high-school education. The three young men, Radhakrishnan, Raju, and Kannan were around twenty years of age and farmers by occupation, while the only woman in the group, Mangai, was thirty-seven years old. The collection was made by John M. Kennedy, an M.Phil. student in 1991 at Manonmaniyam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli. Krishnan narrated many tales, of which two will be analyzed here (Kennedy 1991). The tales were all narrated in Tamil, and the translations are mine. While I do not omit any details of the tales, where colloquial expressions and dialectical words could not be translated precisely, I offer provisional translations. For instance, in the first story I present, when the Tamil original says that the "coconut shells of the Chettiyar ran away," I translate that remark as ". . . both his [the Chettiyar's] knees were badly damaged," since in Uttumulai dialect, one's knee caps are referred to as coconut shells.

Tale Number 1: A Chettiyar with Two Wives

There was a Chettiyar who had a wife but no children. His wife insisted that he take a second wife. So he married another woman. Both women lived in the same house for some time. But the arrangement did not last long. They began to quarrel; the village chief intervened and said that the first wife should live in the

ground floor and the second wife on the first floor and that the Chettiyar would live one month with the first wife and the next month with the second wife. On the thirtieth day, the second wife called the Chettiyar from upstairs and the first wife heard it. Only a ladder was used to go up in those days. When the Chettiyar was climbing up, the first wife caught hold of his legs, and the second wife caught hold of his hair. This went on for some time. Suddenly both the women lost interest and let go at the same time. He fell on the ground and both his knees were badly damaged. The village chief saw him and ordered that the right knee wound should be cured by the first wife and the left by the second.

The first wife, being wiser, used some good medicine, which began to cure the wound, but the second wife applied lime powder, which made the wound worse. One day the second wife was making *dōsai*[1] and suddenly thought she would examine "her" wound. She saw both the wounds; the first wife's wound was almost cured. She could not bear it and hurt the first wife's wound with the *dōsai* ladle. The first wife, who had washed her hair, was untangling it with a *chinukkoli* [which looks like a knitting needle]. She suddenly thought she would take a look at "her" wound and went to the Chettiyar's room. On seeing the second wife hurting, "her" wound, she poked the second wife's wound with her chinukkoli. The Chettiyar was crying in pain and was almost dead.

Tale Number 2: A Mother-in-law and Her Daughter-in-law

There lived a mother with her son. The mother arranged the son's marriage. The bride was so innocent that she was cheated by her mother-in-law. The old woman would cook, both she and her son would eat, but they would give nothing to the daughter-in-law. One day she cooked rice and fish curry and went to see some quarrel in the street. The daughter-in-law was tempted to taste the curry and soon she had eaten everything. When the mother-in-law returned, she was shocked and asked her about the food. The daughter-in-law said, "I ate it up."

The mother-in-law waited for her son to return home and when he arrived she told him, "See, this kind of wife is not necessary for you. Take her to the cremation ground and burn her." He put

her in a gunnysack and took her to the cremation ground. He forgot to take a matchbox with him. He left the bag and rushed back home to fetch a box of matches. As soon as he left, the girl cried, "Help." There were some shepherds around who let her out and put a dog in her place in the bag. The girl went toward the forest, [climbed up and] sat on a tree, and fell asleep.

There came a team of robbers who sat down under the shade of a tree and began dividing the stolen jewels among themselves. Among these robbers there was a blind robber who was not given his due share. He said, "Be just, men. If you are not just, thunder will strike you." The girl who was sleeping suddenly fell down from the tree, and the robbers, thinking that it was thunder, ran away leaving the stolen loot there.

She took all the chains and necklaces and went home. Her mother-in-law was shocked to see her alive, but she was happy to see the jewels. She asked what happened. The girl told her that her husband burned her, that she went to heaven and met her father-in-law and other relatives there. The father-in-law gave her all these jewels as gifts. He further asked why the mother-in-law [his wife] did not visit him, and said that he would be very happy if she visited him.

The old woman was greedy and soon asked her son to burn her too. He took her in a bag and burned her. In the night he was waiting for his mother to return from heaven loaded with gifts. He asked his wife, "You returned soon; but mother has not returned yet, why?"

She said, "Your mother has met her husband after such a long time. So she won't return soon. She will bear five or six children and will live with your father happily. Just go to sleep."

Before I discuss the responses of audiences and speculate on their implications, I will move on to a performance I arranged in my house in the city of Madurai. The storyteller was forty-three-year-old Mrs. Deivamani, who was a university teacher with a doctorate in economics. She came from the Nādar caste, which appears in government lists as a "backward caste," although at present it is one of the economically prosperous castes in Tamilnadu. Traditionally, most of the men of this caste are businessmen, but in recent times, both Nādar men and women pursue higher education. As a child, Mrs. Deivamani learned several tales from her grandmother in her village home in Virudhunagar, which has now become an industrial

suburb of Madurai city. Mrs. Deivamani was a keen observer of traditional Nādar feasts and fasts.

The men in the audience were Yadheendran (a forty-year-old bank employee) and twenty-year-old Karthik Prabhakar (who had a master's in literature and was studying for a master's degree in physical education). The women, apart from myself, were the following: thirty-five-year-old Mrs. Andal Yadheendran who had earned an M.A. in social work, and was employed as an adviser in a well-known automobile firm. The Yadheendrans were Naidu Hindus. Then there was Mrs. Duraipandi, a thirty-eight-year-old Pallar Christian who worked as a second-grade teacher; Mrs. Yasodha Prabhakar (with an M.S. degree in computer applications); Ms. Pavai Venugopal, a Naidu, a twenty-one-year-old MBA student; Mrs. Sundari Kannan, a forty-five-year-old homemaker and a university graduate from the Nādar caste; and Mrs. Dhanam Oyyappan, also a homemaker with high school education. Mrs. Yashoda Prabhakar, Karthik Prabhakar, and Mrs. Oyyappan were Yādavas. Also present were two primary school boys and one high school girl. Although I mention the castes of these individuals, caste backgrounds did not seem to have any impact on either the reception or the narration of the tales. While I had known Mrs. Deivamani for more than twenty years as a friend and colleague, and the members of the audience had been my neighbors for about ten years, Mrs. Deivamani did not know many members of her audience. While there was initial reserve when she began narrating stories, perhaps because of this unfamiliarity and also perhaps because the listeners were unaccustomed to an "arranged" social performance, after a few minutes, they began to interact and participate in the event. The audience and Mrs. Deivamani belonged to more or less the same reference group in terms of education, social expectations, and place of residence. Although they differed in their caste identities, they shared language, values, and beliefs. The following three tales were told by Mrs. Deivamani.

Tale Number 3: Thirumalai Nayakkar's Wife[2]

Thirumalai Nayakkar had a queen who used to boast that gold ornaments and jewels would be found floating even in drainage water in her mother's home. The king could not bear this after several repetitions. One day he told her, "Let us go to your father's house and see if what you say is true."

She was afraid that she might be exposed and, therefore, made some prior arrangements. She took a lot of jewels from the

king's treasury, which she planned to show to the king when he visited her parental home. Soon, however, the king discovered the trick. He sent the queen to her parents' house and said, "Stay there. Don't come back, if you come back my treasury will become empty."

In Dr. Deivamani's view, this tale tells us that a woman should not make false boasts about her mother's riches in her husband's house.

Tale Number 4: The Tale of the Eight Storks

There were a husband and wife who had six children. Every day the husband used to go hunting and would bring back exactly eight storks. One day he told his wife, "If only we did not have these children, both of us could share all eight storks and be happy without hunger. So we shall kill them." The wife agreed and told him that she would kill them. The next day when he went hunting, he could bag only two storks. This kind of hunting continued for several days. He repented killing his kids, and told his wife, "I thought we would be happy. But we are getting only two storks; one each as before. This is not what we thought would happen." The wife told him, "I knew you would soon come to this conclusion. That is why I hid them in baskets away from your gaze." Saying so, she let them out. Then they were happy and content with what they got.

Tale Number 5: On a Mother-in-law and Her Daughter-in-law

A mother-in-law was very rude to her daughter-in-law. Only after both she and her son had eaten, would she allow her daughter-in-law to eat. She would give her rice mixed with *tumbai* [white flowers]. It would take a long time for the daughter-in-law to separate the flowers and eat the rice, of which there was usually very little. One day when they went to a wedding feast, the mother-in-law did the same thing there too. When her son learned about this, he drove his mother away and lived with his wife happily.

Some Reflections On Audience Responses

Responses To Tale Number 1: "Tale Of A Man With Two Wives"

Mangai's responses to Krishnan's narration in Uttumalai included the following remarks: "A quarrel between two wives of a man would always be terrible," and "A man with two wives deserves such punishment!" When Krishnan said that the moral of the story was that any man who had two wives would necessarily suffer, Kannan, one of the unmarried men, remarked—the other men were silent during and after the narration—"Only the second wife will be affectionate." Kannan used an idiomatic expression for "second wife" [*cinna vīṭu*], which literally means "small house." At this, Mangai was provoked to say to Kannan, "I shall tell your mother about your opinion," making an overt reference to the fact that marriages are usually arranged by parents in this community. It is appropriate to recall here the extent to which ". . . the control of sexuality falls more heavily on females in most societies and their sexuality and reproductive nature becomes a part of a family's social strategies" (Claus and Korom 1991: 99). Perhaps Mangai was also voicing a woman's anger against men who have mistresses or more than one wife. Her remark contrasts with the male-centric Tamil proverb, which regards having a mistress in a positive light for the male: "Even if a man has a beautiful parrot-like wife he should have a monkey-like mistress at least."[3]

Mrs. Deivamani narrated the same basic story about the Chettiyar, but colloquial dialect, jokes, and humor were missing in her version. Interestingly, Yashoda, a recently married woman in the "urban" Madurai group, similarly responded with the following remark: "If this is the case of a man having two wives, what will be the fate of a man having more wives?" Andal, Yadheendran's wife, said, "I was happy that in the story women were more powerful and men were less shrewd." Again the only response from the men in the group came from Yadheendran who said, "One wife is more than enough." This remark elicited my own retort that "Women, too, feel that one husband is more than enough!"

The group in Madurai seemed to respond differently from the listeners in Uttumalai to marital arrangements, with both men and women noting the problem with multiple spouses and male dominance. While Mangai too resists the idea of multiple spouses, one wonders if her reasons for resistance are different? Do workplace pressures and tensions of urban

living contribute to "urban" responses in the depiction of gender balances in the tales? The comment of another woman on women's power and men's lack of shrewdness hints at resistance to male dominance.

Responses To Tale Number 2: "Tale Of Mother-In-Law And Her Daughter-In-Law"

Mangai's responses stood out against the general silence from the men listening to this story in the village context of Uttumalai. She expressed great interest in the description of the jewels—an interest that Krishnan made special note of—but when Krishnan, the storyteller criticized the daughter-in-law, Mangai chided him. Also when Krishnan, as part of his narration, said, "The daughter-in-law told her husband, 'Your mother has seen her husband . . . she will bear five or six children," Mangai took exception saying, "Don't talk so badly about women." At once Krishnan responded to her comment and told the others, "See how she defends her own sex!" The tale-teller's direct responses to Mangai's presence in his audience, and the group's enthusiastic laughter that encouraged him to bring more humor and realism into his narration, provide an apt example of a dynamic that Alan Dundes observed in connection with a speaker who changed a joke to a considerable extent on seeing a woman in the audience. Audience behavior, even nonverbal behavior such as facial expression, can influence the telling of a joke (Dundes 1980: 27). In Madurai, however, it turned out that the women remained silent, and it was Mr. Yadheendran who said factually, "Mothers-in-law are usually cruel to their daughters-in-law." He also opined, "A daughter-in-law would dominate her mother-in-law only if the mother-in-law was aged." Another man said his personal experience with his mother and wife corroborated the tale's views.

Responses To Tale Number 3: "Thirumalai Nayakkar's Wife"

Krishnan, the storyteller from the village of Uttumalai, did not narrate this story. When Mrs. Deivamani narrated it in Madurai, one of the men told her to proclaim loudly that women should not brag about their natal families so that "everybody" [read: his wife] "got the message." At this comment, his wife said, "You were quiet till now. Did it take this tale for you to burst out?" The personal overtones of this exchange perhaps comment on a common belief, which may have much truth to it, that

Indian women usually praise their parental homes and men usually neither like nor accept this praise. This is a cultural tradition that would provide good material for psychoanalytic interpretation; as Freud long ago recognized, cultural traditions are internalized during childhood in the individual superego, which becomes the vehicle of tradition and a bearer of all the age-old values handed down from generation to generation (Kakar 1981: 11). A wife's pride in her maternal or natal home can also be understood as arising from "the special maternal affection reserved for daughters, contrary to expectations derived from social and cultural prescriptions, [which] is partly to be explained by the fact that a mother's unconscious identification with her daughter is normally stronger than with her son" (Kakar 1981: 60). As with Mangai who protested against Krishnan's deprecatory remarks about women, women in the Madurai audience spontaneously defended women's feelings portrayed in the tale and in the narrating context. This unrestrained gender identification illustrates Sudhir Kakar's observation that "our biological-physical endowment indelibly embellished by the culture of the particular society which surrounds us from the beginning of life, [envelopes] us like the very air we breathe . . . [W]ithout [that] we do not grow into viable human beings" (Kakar 1981: 8–9).

Responses To Tale Number 4: "Tale Of Eight Storks"

This story also was not narrated by Krishnan. In Madurai, the men made no comment, but the women brought up social issues and policies that discriminate against girls. Two women took seriously the subject of killing of children in the tale, relating the scene to female infanticide in Tamilnadu and to family planning, both of which topics had been heatedly argued against in the media. One could ask how much this engagement with the media and concern with social issues has to do with the education and professional background of listeners in this "urban" context.

In Tamil homes, folktales are frequently told by women and sometimes by men. A grandmother's tales told to her grandchildren serve not only as an entertaining pastime but at a deep level also hand on cultural messages from generation to generation. Although the idea that women are dependent on men throughout their lives often has been pounded into the consciousness of Indian women, girls, and even infants, tales and songs told and sung by women protesting against their male counterparts are frequently encountered (Venugopal 1998: 2). Not only tale-tellers but also

women present at tale-telling performances show their protest over men's control and dominance and defend their sex at crucial times. Viewed contextually and from an ethnographic point of view, the men's and women's utterances in this study reveal social and psychological underpinnings: male dominance over the female, woman's indirect way of opposing and condemning men's attitude and behavior, faith in the system of arranged marriages, and a mother's role in her son's life.

The debate that ensued among women in the Madurai setting and Mangai's responses to Krishnan's tales in a rural village possibly reflect how societal pressures impinge on women's daily existence and on their sense of self at every turn. Referring to nonclinical interviews documented by Margaret Cormack in *The Hindu Woman,* Kakar writes, "Some of the traits connected with low self-esteem—depressive moodiness, extreme touchiness and morbid sensitivity in interpersonal relations—come through in the testimony of modern educated Indian girls . . ." (Kakar 1981: 60). In my study, even preliminarily, gender seemed more underscored than geographical location in the responses of audiences. Expressions of resistance vary with the social locations of women's lives, whether these are in so-called rural or urban settings, but they share a dissent about patriarchy. To build on Kakar's insights, perhaps women in Mangai's situation use the medium of folklore and folksongs to express these feelings: "'God Rama, I fall at your feet and fold my hands and pray to you, never again give me the birth of a woman'" (quoted in Kakar 1981: 60).

For even a speculative analysis of some of these responses, it is important to bear in mind that folklore performances should be interpreted contextually so that the influence of individual, social, and cultural factors that shape them and make them meaningful can be brought to bear on the interpretation. As Richard Bauman has noted, "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (1986: 2). American folk narrative tellings lead to similar observations. Consider the following remarks of Dan Ben-Amos about a tale-telling event: "The teller knows his audience and relates specifically to them, and the listeners know the performer and familiarity is often relative to the size of the general reference group. A storyteller who has a regional reputation may entertain people whom he does not know as intimately as he knows the people in his own village. Yet, even in such cases, both the performers and the audience belong to the same reference beliefs and background knowledge, have the same system of codes and signs, the social interaction. In

other words, for a folklore communication to exist as such, the participants in the small group situation have to belong to the same reference group, one composed of people of the same age or of the same professional, local, religious, or ethnic affiliation. In theory and in practice tales can be narrated and music can be played to foreigners. Sometimes this accounts for diffusion. But folklore is true to its own nature when it takes place within the group itself" (Ben-Amos 1979: 440–441).

In this tentative exploration, what is striking is that women seemed to express resistance, not around an urban/rural divide, but around issues of class, suppression, and struggle against in-laws. At the same time, continued study of tales that are told both that in cities and village areas could help illuminate the complexities of gender in narration and participation in rural and urban contexts.

Notes

1. A crisp fried bread made of ground boiled rice and blackgram.
2. Thirumala Nayakar was a famous Telugu king of the seventeenth century who ruled over southern Tamilnadu, with Madurai city as the capital.
3. *Kili pola pontatti iruntalum kuranku pola oru vappatti venum.*

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4

Voiced Worlds: Heroines and Healers in Muslim Women's Narratives

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Introduction

In this article, I focus on women's folk narratives in a Muslim community in the coastal district of East Godavari in Andhra Pradesh that I studied in 1989–1991. Research on women's contemporary folk culture in the Indian Muslim community is relatively scarce (see Grima 1992; Flueckiger 1995), although we have studies on other aspects of Muslim women's lives in South Asia (e.g., Papanek and Minault 1982; Metcalf 1990; Kumar 1994). Largely unfamiliar to the academic world, neither is this world familiar to the general public, even though Hindus and Muslims live in the same neighborhoods. This unfamiliarity often results in a deep divide between different populations that perpetuate social stereotypes, like the perception that women in the Muslim community have no folk forms of expression other than their religiously prescribed duties and lives within four walls. I discovered that even Muslim men held this stereotype although they were aware that Muslim women have other forms of expression. My own fieldwork convinced me that Muslim women seem to hide or hesitate to reveal these other forms of expression since such forms may not be socially approved. Once women became convinced that the purpose of my study, however, was to understand their little-known forms of self-expression, they began to share their repertoire with me in order to promote understanding across communities.[1]

It was not smooth sailing, however. There were ups and downs, just as might be expected in cross-cultural ethnographic endeavors. Although the outcome was a happy one, I had to cross many barriers to understand these expressive traditions across the multitude of stereotypes of Muslim/women/folk/narrative. While some people expressed doubt about my ability to participate in Muslim women's worlds given my Hindu identity, being a Hindu woman, in fact, helped me because it communicated the genuine interest of another woman—although an "outsider" member of the majority Hindu community—to learn about, and to appreciate, Muslim women's universes. I made interesting discoveries that introduced me to a range of subgenres of narrative in women's folk culture.

The narratives I present here were originally told in Urdu and subsequently translated by me into Telugu and English. Like other Indian languages, Urdu has its own regional flavor in the Godavari district: in syntax and vocabulary, it closely resembles Telugu, the regional language of Andhra Pradesh. The narratives in this essay are from both rural and urban settings, and represent approximately half of the tales told to me. I was struck by the powerful expressive gestures and language, the bold, open questioning, responding, and criticizing, as well as by the power of women, as reflected in folk religious systems and narrative structures, to which their stories introduced me. This study demonstrates that power does not necessarily exist only with "literate" women, and that female power is commanded and expressed in many ways. These wonderful artistic oral narratives represent one such expression of women's power.

The Storytellers And Their Tales

I provide a brief background of the narrators' lives in order to contextualize the narratives that follow. In nearly every neighborhood I visited, I found an elderly woman who was regarded as an *Ustādbi* [a traditional teacher who trains young children, especially girls, in the recitation of the Qur'an and other regular prayers as well as in Urdu]. Some of them hold congregations in homes weekly and on special days of religious importance. Along with these duties, they also lead *kahānī* [folktale] performances, and ritual storytelling about women saints. Some of them perform a kind of healing as a part of their duties, and they also play a prominent role in both religious and secular musical traditions.[2]

These varied activities demonstrate that women share the common formal religious culture that is marked by practices of *namāz* [daily

prayer], and fasting during *Ramzān* [Ramadān], but that simultaneously they also maintain a culture of their own within groups of women. Women do not exclude or embrace either of these cultures but reconcile these two paths into one that suits their religious needs.

In age, my narrators ranged from their teens to their sixties. In terms of religious practice, they were mostly from the Sunni sect. Among themselves they spoke Urdu, but they also spoke functional Telugu. With a few exceptions, most of the narrators were not formally educated, but they were certainly culturally literate and extremely articulate, educated through traditional learning. The narratives I present in this essay are typically narrated to women by women in informal gatherings, and also to children through several venues that include their traditional learning environments with *ustādbis*. The storytellers refer to these narratives as *kahānīs* [folktales]. Interestingly, they use the same colloquial term for ritual storytelling. They sometimes use the term *qisse*, which also means folktales.

Initially, these narratives did not seem to be just stories with a beginning and an end. The opening and closing of these oral tellings are quite distinct, sometimes contrasting sharply with published folktales. These differences themselves provide insights into narrators' lives and cultural values, which together with their performance and their content (re)present previously unheard voices and unseen possibilities.

The tales that I consider here share a common platform with Indian folktales in that they have some of the features mentioned in A. K. Ramanujan's women-centered tales (1991: xxv). Acknowledging Ramanujan's pioneering work, I see in these tales shades of the countersystem that he describes. By "countersystem," I do not mean the establishment of an "all-woman domain" that relies on the denigration of the other sex. I mean, instead, that the countersystem of these narratives demands that the voices and claims of women be heard on a par with those of men, because women as a group are yet to be considered as fellow human beings. Although they comprise half of the population of the Indian Muslim community, they have neither possibilities for "active" participation in that society, nor the necessary public "space."

I present summaries of these narratives in three groups. In the first group are folktales recounted only by women. The second group contains tales with some religious bearing, narrated by women, but also by one man. The third set consists of two types of women's folk narratives that are significant for what they embody in terms of unorthodox and folk religious practices.

Tale Number 1[3]: *The Wife and Her Husband*

This tale, an Urdu telling of the False Bride tale-type,[4] was narrated to me by a fourteen-year-old girl, as she took me back and forth between other informants' houses.

> A woman died, leaving behind a fair daughter. The husband remarried. The stepmother, jealous of the fair girl, changed her into a parrot by fixing a nail on her head, and gave her own daughter, a dark girl, to a prince in marriage. The fair girl, now a parrot, happened to sit on a clothesline. As she shed tears, they dropped into the pocket of the prince's shirt, which was hanging on the line. As they fell, the tears turned into *mōti* and *hīra* [pearls and diamonds]. The washerman brought the shirt back to the prince who was puzzled to see diamonds and pearls. The prince made inquiries, and was brought the parrot. He clasped the parrot by its feet, and touched the nail on its head through which the stepmother had effected the fair girl's transformation. As soon as he pulled the nail out, the parrot turned into the beautiful girl. After the prince learned the entire story, he punished the stepmother and married the fair girl, and they lived happily ever after.

The first male character in the story is the paternal figure who remains in the tale as long as the plot favors the "fair" girl. Soon after he is widowed, however, he precipitates misfortune by marrying another woman but then disappears, never to be mentioned again. The stepmother causes all the "fair" girl's misfortune and unhappiness. The "fair" girl invites the second male character into her life and replaces her father's former affections with the prince's love. Thus we see that it is the heroine—and not a male protagonist—who ultimately is responsible for reversing an unfortunate course of events and repairing the damage her stepmother had done to her. Thus she brings about the shift to a good ending, even though misfortune had befallen her because of a woman's evil intentions. The tale was narrated to me solely from a heroine's point of view, in which all other roles were formed and framed secondarily.

Tale Number 2: *The Badshah's Daughter*

The next narrator I present was a homemaker in her forties when I met her. She lived in the village of Katheru, about two kilometers from the town of Rajamundry.[5] She used to train a few girls in her village in meth-

ods of praying and in the recitation of the Qur'an, and also used to visit neighbors' homes by invitation to lead *kahānī* performances. Although she narrated this story to me when I was the only listener, I learned that she occasionally included this story among other stories she narrated to her students. She also told me that during her hours of leisure, she would go to a Hindu neighbor's house in the afternoons where a woman used to narrate Puranic stories. My informant told me that she had been raised in a district that honored the tradition of having a female spiritual teacher, a *guruvulamma*, and it was from her that she had heard some of the stories she knew. Here is a summary of the story she narrated:

> The only daughter of a badshah (bādshāh) [king], a heroine is known to make decisions about everything when her father is unable to. Once, an unknown person sends a message asking the bādshāh to send his daughter to a particular place. If this were not done, the princess would be taken away by force. The princess sets off on her journey, consoling her parents. Soon she meets a prince who is in disguise, and she marries him, but this is not the end of the story. The story takes many turns. One day, the princess's husband disappears. To get him back, she undertakes a quest. On her way, she reaches a kingdom where the king asks her to find his missing son; she finds him and brings him back to the king. The king, very pleased, offers his son to her in marriage. Declining because she is already married, she continues her journey. In her next adventure, she kills a demon to save the only daughter of a mother.[6] In this journey, she is helped by an old woman in one of her trials. In another episode, she meets an old man who suffers from a disease, which she cures using herbs. In return, the old man helps her. In the end, the princess even goes to the "world of gods," from which she gets her husband back. She rejoins her parents who applaud not only the fact that she won herself a husband, but more than that, they praise her *intelligence*.

The heroine in this story is not just a beautiful doll waiting for a prince to come someday to marry her, and marriage is not her only destiny. She has many other desires to fulfill. When the princess's father is worried and indecisive in the face of a threat, it is she who assumes control and authority. She solves not only her own problems, but those of others as well. The male characters in the story depend on her for support. She accomplishes everything through her intelligence,

and not through physical might, as male counterparts typically do in such situations.

In this tale, as well as in some other tales, it is a revolutionary element that the teller replaces a single boy child with a single girl child born to a king. This is indeed a significant change, appearing as it does in narratives that take shape in a women's world, and it signals an entirely different model for female expectations and behavior. In a woman's narration, even the characters occupying the position of kings (males who are powerful) are unable to solve their own problems; they depend on and must request the female protagonist's support. Furthermore, the heroine, as in this story, makes male characters acknowledge her capabilities, making it clear to men as well as to women that women can and do act as men might, but more important, women can perform even better in trying situations. It may seem surprising to those who are deeply involved in the cause of raising women's self-awareness that women living in sociosexually segregated circumstances give evidence of having evolved such capacities without any formal training, but from their own experiences.

Tale Number 3: *The Princess in the Golden Cow*

The next storyteller was a homemaker from an urban area, an *ustādbi,* who at the time of this narration was in her fifties. She invited other women to this storytelling session. The female audience also included children and thus comprised a range of ages.

> A king who had seven sons threatened his wife with divorce if she delivered a girl child. The wife was miserable, but prayed to Allah to give her a girl child all the same. Her seven sons also consoled her, and told her not to worry, saying that a mother's love is greater than that of a father's. They assured her that they would bring up their sister even if their father abandoned their mother. She delivered a girl child by the grace of god, and she and her seven sons brought her up in secret. When the girl grew up, she asked her mother to show her her father, and also demanded that she show her the outside world. Finding it difficult to conceal her presence now that she had grown up, her brothers and their mother tried to provide for her by having her live safely somewhere else. They hid her in a statue of a golden cow. With the princess inside it, it floated down a river until it came to a washerman. He took it to a prince, who eventually married the princess.

But suddenly, the party of the bride to whom the prince had previously been engaged showed up and killed her. The prince, with the help of his *vazīr* [minister], consulted a *jādugarni* [a female magician] who said she would be able to restore the princess to life, provided she was brought the dead body. An old woman helped the prince recover the corpse of the princess. The *jādugarni* breathed life into the princess's body and the tale ends with a happy reunion.

In the first instance, the princess's very existence is unwanted and then threatened by her father, the first male character to appear in the story. From then on, the heroine seems to cast every male character into an inactive and secondary role or into that of a helper. The bādshāh's seven sons would seem important, given their status as "sons" and by their sheer number. But for the teller and her female listeners, it is a girl child that is all-important in this story. The mother, despite her husband's threat, recognizes the importance of her own gender in her firm decision to bear a girl child.

Further, the mother states that she had a girl "by the grace of God," thus distinguishing between the grace of God and the dictum of her husband. In answering her prayer for a girl, in her eyes, divine approval affirms her desire. This divine support contrasts dramatically with her husband's psychosocial threats. By emphasizing that her daughter's birth resulted from the grace of God, the mother indicates her separation from a male-dominated society, symbolized by her husband's demanding voice. The mother further opposes her husband by engaging the support of her seven sons, and proves that she retains enormous influence over them, despite their being part of the male world.

Born to a father who hates her very being, the daughter (the heroine) exemplifies the same kind of social intelligence that her mother has exhibited by reducing potential male opposition to an inactive status or to a secondary role. Her request that she be allowed to see the outside world can be seen as suggestive of the feelings of many young girls who are silently confined to their homes, but have a strong urge to enjoy the privileges available outside the home to their male counterparts. It must be pointed out that in this woman's tale, punishment avoids aggressive violence, instead always moving the plot forward in a manner that favors the tale's heroines.

In these women's tales, opposing males are either (re)moved from their positions, are weakened in power, or are simply allowed to wither away. The prince and his *vazīr*, both males, are forced to consult not a

(male) *jādugar* but a (female) *jādugarni*, who in fact holds the power to breathe life into the princess's dead body. Furthermore, to locate the princess's body, they seek help from another female, an old woman.

Tale Number 4: A brother-and-sister tale. The narrator of story Number 2, "The *Badshah*'s daughter," recounted this tale:

A brother and his younger sister lost their parents. One day, while they were going for a walk, they came to a bridge where a signboard announced that whoever crossed the bridge together should either get married or else should go to opposite ends of the bridge. The sister makes the decision, and asks her brother to go back and rule the country to keep their father's name. For her part, she decides to cross the bridge and live alone, but before they part, they promise each other that they will meet at the same place after their marriages.

The sister crosses the bridge, doesn't know where to go or what to do, and begins to weep. An old woman hears her and comes to her. She consoles her saying that the two of them could live together, since she too is alone. With the old woman's help, she meets a prince, gets married, and bears a girl child. After a time, her husband dies and her daughter grows up.

As promised, she meets her brother and expresses her wish to give her daughter in marriage to his son. Her brother turns down her proposal and insults her. He also ridicules her in saying that she should give her daughter to a *faqīr* [a Muslim mendicant, ascetic, or wonder-worker]. She goes in search of a *faqīr*, and meets a prince who bears that name! She gives him her daughter in marriage, and the prince later defeats her brother in battle on her behalf.

In the story, both brother and sister initially face the same fate. But it is the sister who takes the initiative in making a decision for both of them. The pivotal position of females continues, as the sister meets an old woman who guides her to the prince who fathers her girl child. And finally, when the brother treats her with scorn when she offers her daughter to his son, the sister punishes him indirectly, through the agency of her princely son-in-law.

This brother-and-sister tale has many variants. For example, one variant about seven brothers and a sister is popular among women of all age groups in this community, and I heard it narrated by a woman in her sixties. What made her story particularly interesting were the changes she made to

gender roles likely to be depicted in published sources. This woman's narration retained the central theme "sister saved by her brothers," but her telling changed the functions of the *dramatis personae* in ways that are consistent with the Muslim women's narratives discussed in this essay.

The story about the seven brothers and their sister underscores the importance of a single sister, whose recovery from a demon who has kidnapped her is sought by her seven brothers. When they arrive, however, it is the sister who acts as leader, telling her brothers how and when to kill the demon. A well-known story from a major thematic group of brothers-and-sisters tales in India, this telling suggests that the brothers' primary function is to rescue their sister, who remains the center of action. The brothers are to look after her and to save her if she gets into trouble. Even though she is younger, she is the leader whom her brothers follow, which contradicts the normal order, in which elders are leaders. This woman's telling maintains the heroine's central position in the family, a social fact that is rarely recognized in the larger society. In this way the narrator fulfills a psychological need within "her" story world where she has authority to create gender justice, which is essential for the very existence of her being.

Some of the characteristics of women's tales here can be identified with those in Muslim communities in other nations. For example, "Lyela in the Lamp Stand," an Iranian folktale, resembles the previous tale (Number 4). As the tale collector, Asha Dhar put it, these similarities are "due to common linguistic heritage of India and Persia . . . [as well as] stronger historical and cultural links among Islamic cultures . . ." (1978: 6). The findings of Sabra Webber from Tunisian Muslim women's folk narratives from Kelibian also closely resemble some of these tales (1985: 311). She writes, "The heroines went on fantastic voyages to search for love. They had adventures. They were sometimes poor girls who escaped from impossible situations and married princes. They were scholarly princesses refusing to marry any but a man cleverer than they" (Webber 1985: 311).

Let us move from these exclusively women-told nonreligious narratives to a set of tales of religious import told by both sexes. The sharp contrast between male-told and female-told tales attracted my attention and tempted me to examine them further.

Tale Number 5: *The Story of a Son*

Abba, a man in his seventies, recounted the next story I present here. Abba and Amma, both now deceased, were Sufi teachers/healers who lived in Hyderabad. Abba was a *murśid*, a spiritual teacher who also owned

a small *kirāṇa dukān* [provisions store] that was attached to their house. While it was Amma who conducted the spiritual healing, Abba played an accompanying role providing oral instructions and teachings. I first came into contact with Amma and Abba through Joyce B. Flueckiger, for whom I was a research assistant during December 1990 to January 1991, in Hyderabad. Joyce, who is completing a book on Amma's life and repertoire, shared some of her research material with me, but the stories I present here were narrated when I was myself present at Amma and Abba's healing and storytelling sessions. (For a nuanced exploration of Amma's healing practice and her identity as a female Muslim healer, see Flueckiger 1995.) I present below one of Abba's stories. In one conversation, he had remarked that mothers ought not to pamper children the way they do. Fathers never do, he added.

> A mother lives with her son. One day the son steals an egg, the next day another, and the third day the hen itself. The mother never warns her son against wrongdoing. He grows more involved with crime and becomes a big criminal who is finally sentenced to death for a serious crime. As his last wish, he wants to meet his mother. He approaches her, and pretending to want to kiss her, he cuts off her tongue for never having used it to warn him, saying that her silence caused his life to be ruined.

Tale Number 6: ***A Story of a Mother and a Son***

A similar story was narrated by a female teller in her thirties, a homemaker and a college graduate, who was employed outside the home for some time before I met her. She explained to me that she would often tell stories to her own child as well as to other children during mealtimes so that the children would be persuaded to eat. She had heard this particular tale from her grandmother who had raised her.

> There once was a mother and her son. He was most undutiful to his mother, but in other ways virtuous. She suffered all through her life because of his undutifulness. After some time, the son died and was sent to hell. Rasūl Allah [Messenger of God, a title used to refer to Muhammad] sent for his mother and told her, "If you excuse your son, he will be sent to heaven, otherwise not." The mother refused to excuse her son. As Rasūl Allah had no other choice, he ordered his representatives to punish the son by burn-

ing. The mother at once melted with maternal love and said that he was "forgiven."

Of the two tellings, the man's tale makes a woman the cause for disaster and ruin in a man's life. But in the woman's tale, it is the woman who endures all kinds of suffering because of her son's undutiful behavior. He brings ruin on himself, but is saved from his dire fate by his mother's love. When it finally comes down to uttering one word, "forgiven," to save him from hell as Rasūl Allah required, the mother is not initially willing to do so. But in the end she does so, and redeems him from suffering.

The contrast between the two tellings, Tale Number 5, and Tale Number 6, is clear. The male teller asserts, authoritatively and decisively, that a woman who brings calamity to a man deserves to be punished, even violently. We never hear the mother's voice in his narration, which relegates her to a passive role, but we see that her "silence" in the narrative in fact does speak. In contrast, in the tale narrated by the female college graduate, the mother's voice is heard all through the story, even though her suffering has been silent. Her "voice" can be understood as compensation for the repression of female voices in general, and for their repression in men's stories in particular. The mother is all-powerful in the woman's story: in her evaluation of the tale, the female narrator stated that if a man is otherwise highly good but not dutiful to his mother, all his virtues are wasted, and she concluded the story with a famous saying of the Prophet Mohammad: "Heaven is under one's mother's feet."

In Tale Number 6, the mother not only raises the son's spiritual condition (from hell to heaven), but by doing so, she also elevates her own status to a higher plane. The teller heard this story from her grandmother, and she informed me that she liked to narrate it to children. Thus it seems as though among women, the narrative transcends the boundaries of time as women claim a high moral and spiritual status for themselves and for future generations of women. The female narrator placed a man in a role opposing the woman in the story, but he was not granted any authority. On the other hand, the female narrator offered due recognition and respect to mothers. The mother in the story exercises her right to forgive or not to forgive as she sees fit. Her response is not intended to punish but to express her disapproval of his undutiful behavior. In the end, it is neither a person nor a force from outside, but her own motherly love that makes her forgive him. The mother in the female narration is never as harsh as the son in Tale Number 5 who blames his mother for his wrongdoing and suffering. There the son judges his mother without taking any responsibility for his lifelong

misdeeds. In contrast, in the female narration, one could say that even Rasūl Allah is predisposed toward women, leaving with the mother the final decision regarding clemency that could alter the son's fate.

In stories such as the preceding one, we see the storyteller as mother, a mother who acts as a child's first teacher, a mother who influences that child in its earliest years to behave properly, a mother who influences a child's gendered socialization—playing roles that promise gender equitability in a society where the formal culture pays little attention to such growth. The narrator's version of this tale shows that women are aware of the hidden dangers of gender imbalances that dismiss women and place them behind a screen.

Both mother-son stories, the male-told (Tale Number 5) and the female-told (Tale Number 6), had a woman in the history of their tellings, for Abba's mother had been his source. Nonetheless, the two tales are different. The female teller implicitly protested against low gender status (as it is reflected in the man's tale) by giving a high status to her own gender. The male teller tried to keep the mother figure in a low status. This comparison reveals the way in which a woman's voice—although ignored—can be raised to achieve gender balance and can continue to work beneath the surface. These narratives suggest that women are never silent when it comes to representing themselves in a world that is often perceived as a man's world. These narratives indicate that women use their voices to safeguard their own space, which is often invaded by their male counterparts.

The second set of tales, those having religious significance, includes another tale by Abba, and one by his wife, Amma, who was in her sixties at the time I heard her narrate these stories. Abba narrated the following tale sitting in the small neighborhood store he managed. Abba's story is summarized as follows:

Tale Number 7

This is a story about a person who was always in prayer, not paying any attention to the material world. One day, a friend asked his wife to prepare some food for this pious man who had not eaten in months. The wife prepared the most delicious food and served it to the pious friend. The man ate the food, but when she asked whether he had relished the meal, he said he didn't know. Surprised, she asked her husband why he had said that. Her husband said that what the friend had said was correct. The wife was confused and could not understand. And so he asked her to cook

some food and keeping a sword hanging over her head, asked her to eat. She did so. Then he asked her the same question. She replied just as the pious friend had, stating that throughout the meal, she feared the sword above her. Then her husband told her that one who is deeply involved in meditating on God would not find taste in material things. She understood.

Tale Number 8

Abba's wife, Amma was a woman healer from Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh, whose patients were from both the Muslim and the Hindu communities. Most of the time she was busy with her patients, but occasionally in conversation, she would narrate anecdotes or tales such as the following story about the greatness of prayer.

> A *badshah*, childless for a long time, is blessed with a prediction of a male child, by a *faqīr*. But the *faqīr* says the boy will survive only fourteen years. The boy grows and reaches fourteen. His parents are miserable. They marry him to a god-fearing and pious girl of the same age and tell her about the boy's fate. She sits to pray and asks her husband to join her in prayer. At midnight a *faqīr* comes and asks for some food. She gives away her bangles and says that by the next day her husband was fated to die. The *faqīr* blesses her and says her *puṇya* [merit acquired from good deeds] will save her husband's life, and then he goes away. The night passes and in the morning the young husband is still alive. Both of them come to her in-laws to pay their respects. His parents, marveling at the changed fate, inquire how it happened. The boy explains what happened during the night, how his destiny was changed by the girl's prayer.

In Abba's tale (Number 7) "she," in a mere passive role, is the one who can't understand things pertaining to the other world, the one who must wait to learn from "him." In the woman's telling (Number 8), neither the boy's parents nor the boy himself are capable of changing the boy's destiny. In Amma's tale, a *woman* changes his destiny and is able to lead him to safety, even in the most crucial situation, and gives him life. It is noteworthy that Amma, whether consciously or unconsciously, adopts the daughter-in-law's point of view in lexical terms: the couple touched the *in-laws'* feet to pay their respects (daughter-in-law's point of view), not the *parents'* (son's point of view).

Similar Solar Samsara story/

The third story in this group was told by the same fourteen-year-old girl who narrated the tale of the wife and the husband (Number 1).

Tale Number 9: ***The Story of a Couple***

There live a husband and his wife. The husband doesn't do any work for a living and just wanders around. Every day the wife asks him to go and search for some work. He agrees and goes into the forest, meditates there, and then comes back. One day, distressed by his behavior, she shouts at him asking how they are to feed themselves and their children. Then he lies, saying that he had got some work. After some days she asks for the money he gets for his work. He says that he will give it to her in the evening and goes out as usual. *Fariśte* [angels] come in disguise and give him lots of money and valuable gifts. On his return, she says, "What happened?" Then he reveals that he does not do any work except meditating in the forest, and that it's the grace of God but nothing else. She too, then realizes the greatness of prayer.

In Tale Number 7 (told by Abba) and in Tale Number 9 (told by the fourteen-year-old girl) the man occupies the central position as one who is on the path to attain closeness to God. Yet, in Abba's telling, the woman has no place in the pursuit of the man's godly knowledge, remaining ignorant until the man instructs her. In the girl's telling, on the other hand, the woman provokes his spiritual quest, although of course, she realizes the value of prayer through the man's discovery.

In all these narratives, women seemed to use storytelling as a vehicle to facilitate the expression of their wishes, needs, opinions, feelings, protests, dreams, and demands. I understand their stories as an ongoing rehearsal in their voice world that helps them to take options and make choices, change social rules, and act according to these new rules within their groups. In their stories they show a different society, where women can give shape to their aspirations and desired actions. But the women they create in stories may not be realized fully in their daily lives. However, the fact that their stories differ from the reality in which they live does not mean that their stories are just fantasies in an imaginative world, which women use to compensate themselves for their unfulfilled desires. As stated by the Indian architect, B. V. Doshi, "To create, you must practice dreaming and believe in it. Fairy tales and myths are powerful and crucial

for the process of creativity" (1994: viii). Such a statement legitimates and supplements the inherent power of women's folk narratives. A conscious narrative tradition is a form of (un)conscious dreaming, and in the process of telling stories, women draw on their inner abilities to formulate and to evolve a culture separate from their surroundings. In such an imagined environment, which they identify as their very own, they, and women like themselves, can occupy active and central roles.

The last group of narratives are grounded in down-to-earth reality and suggest a bridge between the first group of nonreligious tales and the second group of religiously oriented tales, but despite their differences, they share the same characteristics I have so far mentioned in this essay. These tales are traditional folk narratives performed in a ritual context. Women refer to them as *kahānīs,* but when I was collecting information on this genre, a Shi'ite Mullah told me that they should be referred as *maujūde,* which means "miracle stories." However, throughout my fieldwork, I heard women using the term *kahānī*. According to my narrators, nobody knew the origin of these tales. But they believe that these are historical incidents, propagated orally for generations, and later also made available in the form of chapbooks. Women narrate them among women audiences either in fulfillment of a vow or on a regular basis. During a ritual *kahānī* performance, one of the women is invited to tell the story of a particular *Bībī* (a woman saint).

Tale Number 10: *Bībī Segat ki Kahānī*
[The Tale of Bībī Segat]

A king, childless, begs a *faqīr* to have grace on him, so that he can have a child. The *faqīr* grants him his wish and tells him that he will have a girl child and that she should bear the name Bībī Segat. The girl is born and grows up and leads a pious life. She refuses to marry, saying that there are hardships in marriage. Taking the Qur'an with her, she moves into a room and disappears forever. She reappears in a dream to her mother who cries for her. She tells her not to be unhappy but to go and propagate her *kahānī* in the world. She reveals the fact that her story has the effect of fulfilling the wishes of those who listen to it.

In the rest of the story, there are instances in which obedient people are blessed and disobedient ones experience setbacks. But, in the end, the latter realize Bībī Segat's miraculous powers, and receive her grace.

Narratives play a key role in sustaining this particular folk culture, one in which women who occupy positions analogous to that of Bībī Segat are central figures. A culture evolves through these narratives that serves the needs of the women tellers and listeners. We see women playing extraordinary roles in and around this story. In the story, a woman outperforms even the king. The women—as saints, believers, and performers—take the lead and occupy active roles. As in legends, a childless king finally is blessed with a child, but it will be a girl. Further, she will reveal herself only to her mother, someone who will in fact be entrusted with the responsibility to propagate her story. In the fuller version of the story, it is always a woman who must be requested to perform the *kahānī*, even when the narrative situation includes men, or even a king who has to regain lost wealth or a kingdom for his disobedience.

Some *bībī*s have shrines where they are venerated by followers, and in this connection a category of narratives exists about women saints in exclusively female shrines (Narasamamba 1992). Thus a narrative is told about the shrine of Bībī Fātima, the daughter of Mohammed and wife of Ali. According to a Shi'ite woman narrator, the story goes like this.

> Some generations ago, a woman had a dream in which Fātima Bībī gave a divine order to construct a shrine for her, and the construction was to be undertaken by women only. The following day, there were signs of the incident: the appearance of a piece of red cloth and a beautiful fragrance which spread all over the area. The woman who had received the command together with other women constructed the *dargāh* [shrine] and she became *mujāvarni* (chief attendant in the *dargāh*s) of the *dargāh*. A *wālī* [a friend of God] who violated the *bībī*'s order that men should not visit her shrine and tried to enter the shrine by force was driven off by a swarm of bees.

This particular folk narrative has made a mark by becoming an informal law that facilitates women's taking charge as *mujāvarni* in the woman saint's *dargāh*. This is a leading and active public role, which parallels that of *mujāvar*s, priests in shrines of male saints. This also demonstrates how a specifically women's folk narrative might bring about a greater structural change in the larger society within which women live. It is notable that—with the exception of a few historically known *bībī*s such as Fātima *bībī*—the *bībī*s mentioned in other such narratives are saints who were once ordinary

women and housewives who had led pious lives, had performed miracles, had both blessed the people around them with their gracious acts, and had punished their disobedience, even men's disobedience, thus eventually making them understand the *bībī*'s power.

Conclusion

The three sets of narratives discussed in this article are arranged in an order that reflects the ability of women to actively participate in their communities. Thus, their social roles are less legitimized in nonreligious folktales, more in those with religious bearing, and most in *kahanī*s. The underlying thread in all these narratives is that women play active or extraordinary roles as protagonists who go beyond prescribed norms of society, overcome adversaries, and transform obstacles to their advantage.

Lila Abu-Lughod concludes from her study of Bedouin women that "sexual segregation is not inherently bad for women" (1985: 657). Similarly, I find here that women have turned segregation to their advantage. For each male *faqīr, mullāh, mujāvar, jādugar, ustād,* and male saint, women uphold the authority of a female *faqīrana, mullāhni, mujāvarni, jādugarni, ustādbi,* and woman saint both in narrative and in social worlds.

These features tell us that women who perform and carry on narrative traditions are not just passive bearers, but are custodians, critics, reviewers, makers, and remakers of societal structures. In order to enjoy their due share in all spheres, they perform in safe circles of small groups utilizing a safer stamp of "oral tradition," because the oral tradition that they hand on remains free of challenge from the so-called mainstream social tradition.

Features that I identify and discuss here can be found in other Islamic communities, as Kaveh safa-Isfahani has demonstrated in his study of female-centered worldviews. In writing about Iranian society, he states that ". . . [in] male-centered structures of hierarchy and segregation . . . there is a need to view women (and other subdominant segments) not merely as passive participants, but as vital protagonists interacting with the structures of their domination, necessarily exercising some degree of autonomy, not only in defining and interpreting, but in redefining and reinterpreting how the dominant structures define and interpret them" (1980: 34). He mentions ". . . religious and secular folklore which have major female heroines; . . . and a rich body of women centered, Islamic folk rituals and beliefs . . ." (34). In her study of women's general cultural practices—

including folk culture—Margaret Strobel has also examined the ways in which "the sexual segregation prescribed by Islam contributed to female interaction across class lines and thus favored the formation of a female subculture . . ." (1979: 1). Evidence like this tantalizes the researcher by suggesting the possibility that similar features that are yet to be discovered exist across the broad geographical sweep of Islamic cultures.

Notes

My deep gratitude to my teacher and supervisor, K. V. Rao. His constant guidance for over a decade has been a cornerstone of my intellectual and academic growth. In addition, my hearty thanks to Margaret A. Mills for going through this manuscript in its initial stage and making suggestions.

1. During the course of this research, women in this community extended warm hospitality to me; hospitality is a tradition they honor, and I gratefully benefited from it.

2. For more details on this subject, see my article "Muslim Women's Songs in Andhra Pradesh," *The Bulletin* 13.1 & 2(1994): 46–53.

3. Aided by the narrators of the tales, I have provided titles of stories mostly for the convenience of readers. Neither narrators nor their audiences titled the stories.

4. Ralph Troger has extensively discussed the false-bride tale type in Bengali folklore (1966).

5. At the request of the women who narrated some of these stories, I do not disclose actual identities.

6. This part of the story is similar to the story of Bhima and Bakasura from the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, except that in the epic, Bhima saves the only son in a family.

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5

Transformation of Gender Roles: Converging Identities in Personal and Poetic Narratives

P. S. Kanaka Durga

In India's privileged civil society, knowledge, truth, and reality are constructed in terms of the dominant male gender, and female voices and experiences are either ignored or merely given passing reference in the representation of cultures, which results in a monocular depiction of society. Folklore, on the other hand, depicts the totality of tradition-based creations by both men and women in a variety of gender relations with a matrix of power and sexuality in many different cultural contexts. Folk narrative captures the experiences of women and men in different expressive or generic forms and demands attention by depicting interactions between gender and genre.

Each generation forms, and transforms, generic expressions and transmits them orally to the next generation. In this transmission, women play a prominent role as tradition bearers. In the process of socialization, women internalize traditions and values and also perpetuate them for generations by expressing them in their own lives as they live them and in generic forms peculiar to their own cultural groups.

In oral narrative, women are free to compose, recompose, and disseminate creations that more often than not reveal unexpected voices. Reality, as they construe it, projects fantasy about protest against, resistance to, and dissatisfaction with their society in ways that are free of filtration and censorship (Kanaka Durga 1999a). Their folk narratives echo complementary and contradictory negotiations of men and women who operate within the matrix of

gender-power-sexuality. As such, they are of great cultural value for interpreting women's perspectives.

Women's folk narratives uncover the process of constructing a gendered self-identity within the sociocultural context of their own lives. Further, they represent conflicts that arise within an individual, as well as between individuals and society, and also suggest strategies for negotiating conflict and for balancing gender relations within family and society. According to Wendy O'Flaherty, women's folk narratives show a perfect blending of tradition and creativity, that is, of artistry in the context of folkloristic performance (1989: 5). These narratives provide vital entry points for examining interactions between the individual and society in the construction of gender.

Recent discourse on folk narrative research recognized gender as an issue in culture studies (Appadurai et al. 1991; Abu Lughod 1986; Ramanujan 1986a, 1991a; Degh 1969; Brill 1978). Women's personal narratives are primary documents for analyzing gender issues. Grounded in women's lives, they reveal the perceived gender roles and how meaningful they are to their lives vis-à-vis society. Women's personal narratives offer stories about how women negotiate their exceptional gender status both in their daily lives and over the course of their lifetimes.

Gender is perceived not only as a variable factor in the study of folklore, but also as an ever-present variable in the analysis of performance of a particular narrative. In this essay, I make an attempt to study women-centered narratives in order to analyze the narrators' personal identity and personality in comparison with those of the characters and events in the narratives themselves. The women-centered narratives can be defined as those that are told by women, are owned by women, and are centered around women (Ramanujan 1991 33–34; 1991a xxv–xxvi). These narratives reveal the existence of an independent and exclusive domain for women within which they freely identify with female and male characters in texts that they perform. This evident interchangeability of gender roles (in terms of transformation and transcendence in the performance context of a narrative) is a strategy adopted by narrators (here, invariably women) to claim their due social status. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that their women-centered narrative structures reenact and dramatize women's struggles and women's search for identity.

My essay is based on fieldwork conducted in Andhra Pradesh. I documented several narratives, both in prose and verse, together with an autobiographical account by an old woman from a pastoral community. To demonstrate the images and the narrator's points of identification with her narratives, I examined five of her poetic narratives together with narratives

of her personal life experiences. Through her narratives she questioned and resisted the stereotypic notion of females whose survival depends on serving males. Though in reality my informant had to reckon with the values and norms of the patriarchal society in which she lived, she—in her narratives—shattered gender boundaries in her own life and demonstrated her desire and hope for a gender-egalitarian social system.

Methodology

When I was collecting folk narratives and songs in the village of Chavarambakam in the district of Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh, I met an old woman about sixty years old named Rājamma. She was very interested in knowing what was going on in her village, and after she learned the purpose of my visit, she encouraged the other women of the village to perform songs and tales for me, as she herself had already done. Whenever I saw her, she was busily engaged in either grazing the cattle or milking her buffalos. However, I was able to gather information about her from the village womenfolk, who were very happy to tell me about her. She was a widow, a woman of the *golla*, or pastoralist, caste who earn their living by herding cattle and by farming. She was very good and helpful to the womenfolk and to the villagers. She knew many songs, tales, riddles, and proverbs, although she was not literate. Almost all the women and the children around her hut in the village learned folktales and songs from her. She was a repository of folklore and also a perpetuator of it who could unhesitatingly perform the most obscene songs as well as agricultural work songs, or long poetic narratives traditionally performed at the time of women's rituals such as *gobbi*.[1] Rājamma did not use separate genre names for her poetic narratives, but simply called them *kathalu* (stories).

Village people called my informant affectionately Rājamma, Rājakka, or *Avva* (Granny). Rājamma called me *ammāyi*, which literally means "young girl," but can also be used to show the kind of intimacy a mother shares with her daughter. For my part, I called her *avva*, "grandmother," an honorific term used generally by young people to address old women. She was very happy with my calling her *avva* and she adjusted her work schedule so that she could share her experiences with me. In many of my informal meetings with her, she performed tales, songs, proverbs, and riddles in Telugu, her native language. The dialect and slang were typical of her ethnic culture.

I wanted to listen to Rājamma's personal experiences in her own words, since I had heard so much about her miseries and her struggles from the villagers. Her personal narrative demonstrated involvement and concern for the women characters in the narratives while she was performing them. Her manner while singing was sometimes emotional and sometimes reserved. Most of the narratives she performed contained woman protagonists, while the narratives themselves appeared to be woman-centered. Her life experiences clearly had an impact on her performance style and were related to the themes of the narratives she preferred.

Rājamma's performances provided me with a corpus of tales that included brilliant poetic narratives, as well as obscene songs. The villagers themselves call the most obscene songs *būtu pāṭalu* or *banda pāṭalu*, both of which center on sex, eroticism, illicit relations, and sensuality. As a highly context-sensitive performer, Rājamma knows what to sing and what not to sing, depending on her audience. For example, Rājamma told me that she could sing a full-length obscene song in gatherings restricted to women and could perform the same song in a mixed gathering by carefully substituting cultural metaphors for the most obscene words in them.

Several questions guided my study. Did any relation exist between Rājamma's personal life and the narratives she performed? Did she identify herself with any of the women or men in the narratives? If so, why and how? Did she correlate incidents in her own life with events in the tales? Or did she represent them in a subverted form? Had her personal life experiences induced her to be a bearer of oral tradition? With these questions in mind, I decided to collect personal narrative not only from her, but also from her co-womenfolk and from other people who knew her, including her children, grandchildren, and neighbors. The information they provided appears in footnotes.

I met Rājamma in a variety of places while collecting her narratives: in the cattle shed, in open fields, in her hut, in women's gatherings under trees, and also in her working place. Highly cooperative, Rājamma responded openly even when I asked her potentially embarrassing questions. Having already narrated systematically, she not only understood my questions, but sometimes rephrased them to give me correct or accurate answers.

My translation of Rājamma's renderings from Telugu to English is neither literal nor literary but cultural, because language is a dynamic behavioral pattern specific to its cultural connotation, denotation, and intonation. Before I devised a method to translate her Telugu into English, I listened to her narratives many times in order to fully understand her colloquial speech. A regional dialect of Telugu, her language is rich in under-

tone and overtone expressions. Translation, of course, does not mean merely finding equivalent textual material in the target language, here English. Paul Ricoeur defines "text" as a sequence of signs longer than a sentence (1971: 553). Lauri Honko considers a text to be any configuration of signs that can be coherently interpreted by a community of users (1998: 140). Hence the phrase "textual material" is loaded not only with literal, but also with cultural meanings, which must be translated without distortion of texture and context. The translation undertaken here is "interlingual," which is to say that verbal signs in the Telugu language are interpreted in the English language (Basnett 1980: 14).

The type of textual material to be translated determines the method of translation to be undertaken. In this context, the "textual material" is in both prose and ethnopoetic forms. It is an oral text that is considered to be open ended and is often expanded or epitomized by the narrator contextually. Rājamma's vocabulary is rich in colloquial and ethnolinguistic forms and here and there she used English terms. No single method is perfect in translating the cultural textual substance of the ethnographic material. Nevertheless, I have followed the "partial translation method" (Catford rpt. 1974: 21, 32) to translate long oral poetic narratives into English. Some native words are retained due to their untranslatability and cultural specificity (e.g., the word *tamma* in the fourth and seventh lines of the *Tale of Kāntha Kāmudi matha*). In translating the poetic narratives, "word for word" and "literal interlingual translation" (Bassnett 1980: 114) is adopted without distorting the inherent meaning of the text, as in "bee" for *tummeda* and "beautiful bee" for *rāma tummeda*. The Telugu word *rāma* in this context literally means "beautiful" and implies "beautiful" or "handsome fellow." The cultural metaphors used in Rājamma's texts are translated to carry the spirit of their language culture from Telugu into English.

Personal Narrative

When I asked Rājamma to tell me something about her personal experiences, she was silent for a few seconds. She asked me, "What are you going to do with my personal experiences?"

I replied in a tone that I hoped would be convincing, "I will write about you."

Then she laughed loudly and exclaimed, "Am I Indira Gandhi or Nehru? How can one write about a woman like me who is a cattle keeper and an agricultural laborer?"

I told her, "Many people know about Indira Gandhi and Nehru very well, because they were prime ministers. But only a few people, perhaps in this part of the village, know your talents. I don't want to write about 'great women' who are familiar to everybody, but about a common villager like you. I want to tell the world about a simple woman, a replica of the folk and of popular culture who carves a domain of her own and lives happily herself in her creations and experiences. In this village I found you a most suitable and worthy person from whom I can gather information. Please kindly render me your personal experiences, so that I can learn something from your life."

Rājamma began to tell me about her family, her brothers and sisters, and her in-laws. She narrated her life experience very coherently, intermixing it with songs, jokes, and short tales, which made the entire context lively and informal. Moreover, it was free from inhibitions and concealments. She began: "My name is Rājamma. I was born in the *Erragolla* sect of the *golla* caste. My father and mother come from Gōvindappanāyuḍi khaṇḍrika in Nagiri Mandalam. His name is Varadayya nāyuḍu and mother's is Narasamma. Our family name is Ukkiri vāru and I was given in marriage to Bomminiṭṭi vāru."

Here I stopped her narration. "*Avva*, you are a *golla*. How can your father hold the honorific title nāyudu?"[2]

She replied, "My grandfather's grandfather . . . I don't remember his name . . . was associated with the Jamindar of Nagiri. He was given a piece of land by Jamindar for cultivation, that is nāyuḍupaṭṭa.[3] Since then my grandfather (Svāmi nāyuḍu) and my father Varadayya held the honorific title nāyuḍu. We have been doing cultivation for three or four generations. Besides, we maintain cattle and sell cattle products."

I asked her to continue her narration and she did so: "I have two younger sisters, Ādemma and Sāvitri, who were married to local bridegrooms. I was married to Rāmasvāmi nāyuḍu of Chavarambakam. My younger brother Munisvāmi nāyuḍu was married to his two nieces, the two daughters of my two sisters. He had no children by his first wife Lakshmi, the only daughter of my sister Ādemma, and therefore he also married my second sister's daughter Malli with whom he had children. Both the cowives live in harmony . . . In my childhood, I was very active. Early in the morning I used to wake up, clean the premises of our big hut and cattle shed, sprinkle the *kallāpi* [water mixed with cowdung], put *muggu* [floor designs] before the main gate. Then I would help my mother milk the cows. Then I would collect milk in a big pot and distribute it to the villagers. Then I would take *chaddi* [curd rice prepared from the previous

night's cooked rice; see footnote 10] from home and go to the crossroads of the village and sell buttermilk, butter, and milk to the villagers. I collected all the coins and gave them to my father. My father was very loving and affectionate to me. I was very happy in my father's home. I played, I sang, I danced . . . why not? Up till my marriage, every experience was sweet and memorable."

Rājamma closed her eyes and it seemed as if she were recollecting her happy past. I asked her, "Were you happy after your marriage? Tell me something about your marriage."

Rājamma said, "My marriage? Do you want to hear? It is a long story full of petty quarrels. All my life has been a continuous struggle; it is full of sufferings, cravings, crying, and poverty . . . My father's maternal uncle [*mēnamāma*] had a son for marriage. My father wanted to give me in marriage to him. But, in the meantime, my maternal uncle arranged a match for me from the village of Chavarambākam. The bridegroom was about sixty years old. Everything was done without discussing the matter with my parents. Later on, he informed my father. My mother grew wild and she scolded my father, 'Why are you giving this tiny girl to an old man in marriage? If she elopes or does some wrong after she marries this old man, what will be the fate of her younger sisters and the honor of the family? Then, also, what is so urgent about her marriage? Is she craving *mindagāṇḍlu* [illicit lovers]? I don't want to get her married so soon at this age. Perform her wedding after I succumb in my labor pains to death . . .' Rājamma stopped here for some time. Then she continued, "At that time my mother was pregnant. Her deliveries were always dangerous. That's why she got frightened. On this pretext she tried to stop my father from getting me married to an old man. But my father could ignore my mother. He was offended at the behavior of his maternal uncle and hence he told my mother harshly, 'I will give my daughter only to this old man. Even if he dies, I don't care. I will perform the wedding.' My mother wept all day. She could do nothing other than that."

I inquired of her, "*Avva*, what about your feelings about these discussions? Weren't you consulted at all?"

Rājamma looked at me blankly and replied wanly, "You know, I was hardly nine years old when I was married. I didn't know what marriage was and why people married. All I knew about marriage was that it meant wearing new clothes, adorning yourself with jewels and going on a palanquin (*pallakī*). I told you that my father and the other men in my family ignored my mother when she resisted my marriage proposal. How could they think of consulting me?"

"*Avva*, can you tell me about your wedding?" I was eager to know the details of her marriage. She began to recollect her experiences at the time of her wedding. She looked into the distance, and spoke slowly. "My wedding was performed at my husband's place, Chavarambakam, since my mother was pregnant and there was nobody to assist with the arrangements for the wedding. However, it was celebrated for three days. I was prepared as bride by *muttaiduvās* [unwidowed women] who gave me the sacred bath three times with chickpea flour, oil, and sandal water. They put vermilion on my forehead and a black spot on my left cheek to ward off the evil eye. My *mēnamāma* [maternal uncle] brought me new clothes, a skirt . . . a Kanchi silk skirt, a blouse, and an *ōṇi* [half-sari]. They dressed me in the bridal dress and adorned me with jewels. I went to the groom's place to the wedding like the other guests. My people scolded me, 'You silly girl, bow your head. You are a bride, not a bridegroom.' I was very angry. I replied, 'I will be as I am. Why should I bow?' I walked into the *paṇḍāl* [ceremonial dais] like the other guests. I was asked to put my hands into the pots of salt and pulses.[4] I did it. On the second day, the wedding was performed. I don't remember the events of my wedding in order. However, afterward my husband tied *tāli*.[5] On the third day we played *vasañtōtsava*. I sprinkled *vasañtam* [water mixed with colors or sandal or fragrances] over my husband and each couple played and sprinkled the *vasañtam* on each other. Then I left the place with my husband for my father's place."

I was very much interested to know about the villagers' impressions of her marriage. I asked her, "*Avva*, how did your family members and the villagers feel about your marriage?"

She replied passionately, "You know how my mother wept and neighbors criticized my father for getting me married to an old man. My father very confidently convinced them, 'You see, people, what is lacking in my son-in-law? He will remain as he is, even after twenty years, but my daughter would soon become old if she gives birth to four or five children. What is wrong in it? There is no age factor for men.' All the villagers kept silent."

I was wondering whether the bridegroom was marrying for the second time. I expressed my doubt to her.

Rājamma shook her head—her husband had not been married before. His marriage with Rājamma was the first one. She explained the reasons for his late marriage, "*Ammāyi*, he did not marry for a long time. He lived in the village as *basivi*.[6] He was free to eat anywhere he liked and go

wherever he wanted to. Till then he had never felt the importance of marriage. His brother, who went to the Second World War, came back. By the time he returned, his wife had died, leaving no children. Since there was nobody else to continue the family name and their lineage, they decided to perform the wedding of my husband."

I was curious about her marital life. I asked her, "When did you go to your husband? How did you react to these new situations?"

Rājamma began to talk about her relations with her husband very openly. She said, "I was at my parents' home till I attained puberty. After that, I went to my in-laws' place. Before that my husband used to come and see me occasionally. I treated him like one of the other relations who always visited our house. My husband used to tease me, 'Young girl, why don't you come to my place? You can help my sister in bringing water or cleaning utensils.' I used to get angry. I replied, 'Who are you? Why should I come to somebody's house and serve?' He used to laugh at my words. At that time I didn't know anything. At the age of eleven years, I attained puberty. My in-laws came and celebrated the occasion. Then I was unable to understand my life. How can I lead a marital life with an old man? What about my future? The talk of older people in and around the family disturbed my mind. Under these circumstances my nuptials were arranged. It was fixed on the ninth day of my puberty. That day we took a headbath[7] and ate lunch with a variety of dishes. In the night after supper, I wore white sari and white blouse. My aunt put flowers . . . jasmines . . . in my hair. In a room a bed was arranged on which scent and jasmines were sprinkled. In one corner, a small table was arranged on which fruits and sweets were kept in separate plates. A glass of milk was also provided. My aunt told me, 'Don't hurt your husband . . . don't be childish.' I drank milk and ate some sweets. I was getting sleepy. I slept on the bed. In the middle of the night, when I was in a sound sleep, my husband was doing something with my body, which was hitherto unknown to me. Suddenly, I woke up and screamed. My aunt, sleeping outside the room, heard my voice and entered the room. She took me out and told me, 'You should listen to your husband. Let him do whatever he likes.' But that night nothing happened. Thus, three days passed. On the next day when I was grinding black grams for cakes I happened to hear the conversation of two women, one my aunt and the other was my neighbor, Lakshmi. I still remember the conversation.

AUNT: "Lakshmi, Rājam is not behaving properly with her husband. She is young and energetic and he is an old guy."

LAKSHMI: "Yes, nowadays young girls are just like her. They don't care about tradition and virtues."

AUNT: "Then why do they marry?"

LAKSHMI: "They marry old ones and elope with young men if they are not satisfied."

This conversation stuck in my mind. I began to think, "Oh, God! what type of persons are they? What happens if I do not sleep with my husband for some time? Why should I give reason to others to speak nonsense about me? Our father, who always settles the villagers' disputes, should not bow his head before anybody. If I do some wrong, his reputation and honor will be lost. I should be contented with what I have. 'One should drink soup poured into one's own hand.' So I should drink the soup poured into my hand. I should be satisfied with my husband, who is given by God.' Thus I made up my mind to be with my husband. I did it. I begot four children. I never felt sad for having an old man as husband . . ."

I wanted to bring her back from the memories of her early days. I asked her, "How was your life at your in-laws' house? Did they receive you well?"

Rājamma asked me, "Do you want me to tell my life at my in-laws' home? Really it was full of miseries, troubles, disorders, and depressions. Not that they are bad, but the circumstances were like that. My in-laws were poor. I had a widowed sister-in-law. She was younger than my husband and was very good and cordial to me. My husband was also very nice and treated me as a child. But poverty was the main problem. My husband was an old man and hence he could not take strenuous jobs. In these conditions my parents helped us a lot, otherwise we would have been landed in much financial crisis. Though by caste we are cattle herders, we had a bit of land and hence at my parents' home there were fewer economic problems. But here all should work to earn daily bread. My sister-in-law looked after home affairs and I worked in the village to support the family. The same schedule which I had at my parents' place was started here again. But the difference is that at my parents' home, my earnings supplemented my father's income, whereas here, my income was the main source of livelihood for the family. I worked as an agricultural laborer in the fields; I cut firewood in the forest and sold it in the village. I pounded grain, chillies, and turmeric for money. Then I brought rice and cooked for my children and others. This was the routine of my life during the early days at my in-laws' home. Even today, you are seeing me. How much strain I am taking to work from early in the morning till late in night? I work like a machine."

I wanted to change her mood. I asked her, "Tell me something about your experiences with your children and the efforts you have made in bringing them up."

Rājamma exclaimed, "My experiences? Oh. It is as big as Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa. In this poverty and with these miseries, I gave birth to four children, Dāmōdara, Sulōcana, Ramakrishna, and Ravi. I was given fifty goats at the time of marriage, but all of them died due to the spread of an epidemic. Only one ram was left. I sold it and opened a grocery shop with the money realized from selling the ram. Since then our condition was a bit improved. I cannot forget the services of my sister-in-law as she was the real mother to my children. I became mother at the age of thirteen and widow before I could attain the age of twenty-five."

I wondered, "*Avva*, how could you manage with your four children in the absence of your husband? Tell me how he died."

Rājamma recollected from her memories and described the events in a lively manner. "He died from his old age, but not with any specific disease or complaint. Old age, poverty, and troubles all culminated in his death. I was very much upset at the death of my husband. I never left him alone when he was sick. He was sick just four or five days before his death. The doctors prescribed a tonic. As soon as he consumed it, he vomited. A pharmacist who was living in my neighborhood asked me to give him something to eat before he took the tonic. I asked my husband to tell me what he wanted. He asked me to bring *laḍḍus* [a type of sweet ball]. I purchased them in the night. He asked me to distribute them among the children. He ate a half of one sweet. He was looking at me throughout the night, before he died early in the morning on the next day. I asked him, 'Why are you looking at my face?' He replied, 'If I shut my eyes for a while, I may miss you. I doubt whether I can see you hereafter from tomorrow.' I slept that night. On the next day morning, he asked to take him into the verandah and keep him on the *arugu* [pyal] in front of the house. I did it with the help of my daughter, Sulōcana, who was pregnant at that time. He relaxed on my shoulder and took his last breath. I did not notice that he was dead. The persons who were observing the scene declared that he was dead. I lost consciousness. An hour later, I realized the situation and began to weep loudly. People tried to console me. One of our neighbors scolded me, 'Weep well . . . but only after the cremation and the other rituals are over. Send telegrams to near and dear and see that everything runs smoothly.' I sent my older son Dāmōdara to collect money from my customers who purchased milk from me. I could successfully complete the funeral and other relevant deeds. There was nothing remaining to me at home except

debt to be cleared and the responsibility of the children to be taken care of. I was always worried about this matter. If I weep in the daytime, I could not earn money and feed my children properly. Day and night my aim was to bring up the children . . . nothing other than this . . ."

She was a bit tired after this long narration of the memories of her husband and of his death. I asked Rājamma, "*Avva,* can I ask you a personal question?" I was a bit shy to put such questions to an elderly woman like her, but she encouraged me to ask. I lowered my voice and asked, "*Avva,* you said that you were married at a tender age and had a brief period of family life that was interrupted by four childbirths, miseries, mishaps, poverty, and struggles. Have you ever had any dissatisfaction with your husband? Have you ever felt the need for a man or consort when you have to fight in this world in the absence of a male support?"

Rājamma laughed at my series of questions. After a while she told me, "I am not a competent and learned woman to answer your questions graphically, but I can tell you my feelings about your questions. To tell you frankly, I have no time to think of these problems, since I have many more things to do. I was quite young when I was married and afterward I was thoroughly busy in childbirths and continuous strain for a livelihood. I was very much put down after the death of my husband both physically and psychologically. Even though he was not helpful in running the family, he was a support to me. Really, I felt his absence. I never thought of trespassing moral values, not because of the fear of society, but for the welfare of my children and self-esteem. If I went wrong, everybody would have pointed fingers at me and said, 'See, see, this Rājamma kept so and so . . . She is now free . . . anybody can enjoy her.' Thus I would have become cheap and lost regard in society. Since my job was public-related, that is, to visit every house in the village for pouring milk or for work in the farms, I had to be very cautious and careful. Otherwise I would have lost my livelihood. So I never had any thought of developing illicit relationships. However, to be away from loneliness and miseries of life, I used to constantly engage in telling tales, singing songs of different varieties, cutting jokes to children, neighboring women, and so on . . . I sought happiness and solace in these acts."

She continued her discussion about her life experiences. "However, I was very active ever since my childhood. In my childhood days, when I was at my parents' home I learned many tales from my *mēnatta* [paternal aunt], who was also a widow and used to accompany me when I took cattle for grazing in the fields. Since I used to have enough time from morn-

ing to the evening in the fields, I used to talk and exchange the traditions I knew with the women from other communities that come as laborers to the farms. As I am interested in the songs and narratives, I could easily pick them up and memorize and perpetuate them to the people. Whenever I heard a new tale or learned a song, I used to memorize and retell it to my younger sisters and friends."

I interrupted her. "*Avva,* I heard and recorded many songs, narratives, and jokes from you. I found that many of the songs and lyrics are romantic, erotic, and sometimes obscene [to me]. Don't you know and sing other types of songs?"

Rājamma asked me, "What do you mean by 'other songs'? Oh! I do know lullabies, sacred songs, and so on. I am not allowed to perform *mañgaḷahāratulu* [sacred songs] in auspicious ritual contexts because I am a widow. Even if I perform such songs, the people who join with me do not feel happy about it. If I sing those songs, the other women ask me to sing only obscene [*banḍa pātalu* or *būtu pāṭalu*] or poetic narratives about women or tales of kings, queens, young princes or to crack jokes or tell riddles."

I wanted to peep into her mind, and I asked her, "How do you feel about such performances?"

She replied, "Honestly speaking, I will be very happy to sing erotic songs and love narratives. I feel that I am more released and relaxed if I perform songs which have good rhythm and rhyme. I can keep even my audience alert and active, which gives me happiness. I can remember and catch such types of songs more quickly than the other types."

I still wanted to know some details of her performances. I asked her, "Why do you always tell tales about women?"

She replied in a low and soft tone. "My girl, I do not know that all my tales are about women . . . I have sympathy and concern for women and their problems. I myself faced many troubles as a lonely woman. I had to stand by the side of my family as if I were a man. So I have a soft corner for the women who suffer in the world of males. I tell such narratives and songs to young girls and children in my leisure time or in the agricultural fields or while grazing the cattle to enlighten them about the nature of the world . . . I seek happiness in memorizing and perpetuating them among the womenfolk."

After a while, Rājamma began to talk about her experiences with her children and their upbringing. Her narration ran as follows: "My eldest son Dāmōdara . . ." She began to wail loudly. I was taken aback, and didn't know what to do. I asked her, "Did I hurt you? What happened to your son?"

She wiped off her eyes with her sari and began to tell me, "My son Dāmōdara! How can I forget you?" She turned to me and said, "*Ammāyi,* if he had died naturally or if I had seen his dead body, my condition would have been different. I do not know whether he is alive or dead. The way he faded away from my sight and life burns my heart. My son studied up to Ninth Class. Due to poverty, I sent him to Madras and put him in a cycle shop. There he learned cycle repairs and mechanics. The owner of the shop was a Mudaliar from Tamilnadu. He was very nice to my son and treated him as his own brother in the beginning. My son Dāmōdara was also equally good and fair. One day the Mudaliar went to Thanjavur on his business. He asked my son to help his wife in his absence. One day, when my son went to his house to pick up a tool, he saw his employer's wife with a young man who was also a close friend of the Mudaliar. My son did not say a word and returned to the cycle shop. Those two culprits saw my son at the same time that he saw them. They were afraid of the event. The paramour belongs to *Jangama* caste.[8] The Mudaliar knew the *jangama,* but not the illicit relation he had with his wife. In the absence of the Mudaliar, they both used to enjoy themselves with each other. As soon as the Mudaliar returned to Madras, that bitch distorted the version of the event and accused my son of not coming to the shop properly and of misbehaving with her and further she scolded her husband for entrusting the shop and his personal affairs to such a faithless fellow as Dāmōdara. The Mudaliar scolded my son and later thrashed him. My son went to the wife of Mudaliar and asked her, '*Amma,* you are my sister-in-law. You are like my mother. It is not good on your part to tell nonsense about me to your husband. Can you quote an incident in which I misbehaved with you? Why have you lied to your husband?' That bitch did not listen to him. My son got angry and came back to Chavarambakam. I asked my son to stay with me. One or two months went by. One day my son asked me for permission to go to Madras, to see his *mēnatta* [paternal aunt]. He said he would come back on the same day. I agreed because he wanted to see his aunt. Why should I stop him from going? That day he took a headbath, wore white pants and white shirt. He was as handsome as the moon. He left for Madras. He did not return. Since then, I have been waiting for him. People say that he is dead. Otherwise he would have come. Whenever a thought of him comes into my mind, I cannot sleep and eat. Throughout the night I will be weeping. That bitch caused the death of my beloved son."

Rājamma wept for a few minutes. I consoled her. I felt guilty and I told her so. She suppressed her grief and patted my back. She told me, "Not

at all. I can release my grief if I speak to people like you. You know . . . my youngest son . . . beloved son . . . Ravi . . . he also died. He died due to blood cancer. This way I was again punished by God."

She stopped for a while and continued her narration about the death of her youngest son. "Every day at night my son used to get a fever. He got swellings in his joints, especially in his knees. Doctors did many tests and declared that his leg should be amputated up to his knee since water is accumulated in his knees. I can do nothing other than accept the reality. They operated on the knee and removed it and gave crutches to him. After three months again some problems started. He began to vomit blood and people suggested to me to take him to Stanley Hospital in Madras. I took him. Days passed. No improvement. My well-wishers suggested that I take him back to Chavarambakam, since the doctors could not do any more. I brought him back to Chavarambakam. After a few days he got fever and again started vomiting blood. He died. I wept like anything. The children for whom I have been struggling, dying . . . it is all a waste. You can imagine my state of mind. It was blank and shabby. I have no capacity to think further. I could not come out of this shock for a long time. But I have to come into reality . . . I have to see to the rest of the family. I have no husband to share with me. Who else is for me except my daughter and her drunkard husband? My son Ramakrishna was not old enough to console me. I persuaded my drunkard son-in-law and my daughter and brought them here with their two children, Premalata and Laksmipati . . . I helped them in their coming up . . ."

I asked her, "How did you help them?"

Rājamma replied, "In the same way my parents helped me when I was in trouble. I raised loans from villagers and purchased buffalos for her. She did business with them and could run the family and repay the debts with the money from selling the milk and its products. Recently, in this village a small *bālvāḍi* [crèche for children] has been opened. A rich landlord helped my daughter to get a job in the *bālvāḍi* as a nanny for the children. Now with the money she gets from the salary and the buffalos, she got her daughter married and is now financially sound. My daughter and children are really very helpful to me. Her children do not eat unless I eat. They like me very much."

Here I could see the difference between her daughter's children and her son's children. I asked her, "Your son's children are not good? Do they quarrel with you?"

Rājamma shook her head. "No. Not at all . . . They are good. We should not blame children. Whatever their parents say, they should listen . . .

My son is very nice and he is gold. If somebody else was in his place, I would have been on the roads, for my daughter-in-law always distorts my conversation with her and complains to my son."

I inquired of her, "*Avva*, why do you speak like this? Don't you have good relations with her?"

Rājamma was about to reply when a woman about twenty-five years old came there, screaming in a loud voice, "*Attamma* [mother-in-law], are you not coming home today? Are you eating at *Vadinamma's* [sister-in-law's] house? There is a lot of work yet to be completed at home. Why do you sit here and chitchat with these city girls? They don't have any work."

Rājamma became silent. She looked at me. Her looks made me understand her daughter-in-law's nature. Rājamma replied to her, "Look Lakshmi, my mind and body are not sound. I may not come home today. This girl gave me a tablet. If possible send me milk through Laksmipati or Ramakrishna. Today I will sleep at Sulōcana's home."

That woman left the place grumbling. Then Rājamma turned to me and began to talk about her. "See, *Ammāyi*, she always behaves in the same manner. Despite my hard work she never talks to me properly. She has no respect for my words. She grumbles at my stay in my son's home . . . How much strain can I take daily? No change in my schedule despite rain, thunder, heat, cold, or any calamity. I have to wake up early in the morning, wash the cattle and cattle shed, take the debris to the field, bring grass to the cattle at home, drink *ambali*[9] [rice soup], take *chaddi*[10] for lunch, and go to the fields to graze my cattle. In the evening after I come back from the fields, I have to milk the cattle, take the milk to the milk center. Then I take a hot water bath, eat food, and sleep. Again the same schedule starts when it is dawn. I never rest for a single minute. After working all day am I not worthy to spend my time in a place where I could get solace or speak with people who treat me as a human being? I never keep a single coin for my personal expenditure. Even now my earnings are more than my son's. Do you believe it? We are not getting much income by agriculture. Since it is a dry land, my son is facing many problems in watering and fertilizing. I am equally struggling along with my son. She must understand my pains at least, even if she does not appreciate . . . You know what happened once? One day one of my distant relatives came to the nearby village Melambakam for a wedding. After the wedding was over, he came to see me. Since it was late at night and the bus to Madras had already left, I asked him to sleep in my house. He was about twenty years old. That day my son left for Nagari to bring fertilizers to the fields. We had only one room. It is a bed-

room and kitchen together. When it does not rain, I sleep in the verandah. When it does, I sleep at my daughter's house. I usually follow this procedure. Then my daughter-in-law took her two children and went to her relations' house, which is just a furlong from my house. I did not object, since I know her mentality. Whenever a new person or guest or anybody comes, she behaves oddly. The boy left the village early in the morning by the first bus. I began my schedule. I was coming from the field with fodder. It was about seven o'clock and again I had to leave for the field. I was surprised that many people were found before my house, among whom I saw my daughter-in-law and her children and Sulōcana, my daughter. I inquired about the matter. To my surprise, my daughter-in-law distorted the entire event of the previous night and told the people that I forced her to sleep with the boy who was in our house last night. I was shocked at her mischief. I had many more experiences with my daughter-in-law, but not of this type. I understood that she had been playing another trick to send me away from her home. I asked her to swear on her children, but she hesitated to do that. She admitted her guilt. All the villagers scolded her and warned her not to do such cheap tricks hereafter. Meanwhile my son came. Somebody told him the whole episode. He grew wild and beat her. But my daughter came to her rescue and took her into her home. My son strictly gave her an ultimatum that she should never behave like this in her life. If she misbehaves she will be pushed out of the house. How many incidents such as this do you want me to quote to reveal her character?"

I wanted to know further about her relations with her daughter-in-law. I asked her, "*Avva*, have you been cordial to her even after that incident? Have you noticed any repentance in your daughter-in-law's behavior?"

Rājamma was relaxed in her reply to my question. "The rivalry between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is the same or similar to that between a cat and a rat or a snake and a mongoose. The fight is unending. But here in my case, it is reversed. Have you understood? I have to adjust to the reality. I can do it. I am not ready to lose my son because of my daughter-in-law. Look, a woman, even if she is rich and self-sufficient, should be under the shade of her father/husband/son. I would have comfortably stayed either alone or at my daughter's house with my earnings. What about tomorrow, if I fall sick? Look at the world. The world is blind. If I try to reform my daughter-in-law, people may think that I am harassing her. The people would find fault only with me. I never in my life was accused by anybody for any guilt. Now, why should I be blamed? After I married, except for a few times, I never went to my

parents' house. Even after my husband's death, I never left this house. Why should I leave it now? This is the place where I should live and die. I am staying here for my son and grandchildren. Despite her ignorance, I still love my daughter-in-law. She cannot alter her behavior; I also cannot change my nature."

I wondered at her worldview. I wanted very much to ask her a few more questions. "*Avva,* I have been asking you many questions and talking to you for many days, I think ten days. You are a very sincere and affectionate person. Even though I am new, you never hesitated to answer many embarrassing questions. I want to know about your thoughts about your future."

Rājamma laughed at me. "*Ammāyi,* what future do I have now? I have already crossed nearly sixty years. My life is over. I am not going to live many more years. I am waiting for the call of God. I did all my duties. I never went astray from my duties. I was loyal to my husband and family. If I did wrong or played mischief knowingly or unknowingly, it was not for my enjoyment or for myself, but for bringing up my family and children. God is there for everybody. He will forgive me. I plead with him for one favor. I should die without being served by anybody. I should leave my people with a smile while I am working or chitchatting with people like you . . ."

I had many subsequent sessions with Rājamma to clarify questions about her experiences. In this section I have discussed those aspects of her personal narrative that are particularly relevant to her poetic narratives.

Summary Of Poetic Narratives

All of Rājamma's poetic narratives had the following refrains at the beginning or at the ending of each line:

gobbiyaḷḷo: a goddess made by a lump of cow dung (narratives 1, 2)

rāma tummeda: beautiful bee (narrative 3)

Rāmacandra: Rāma, the hero of the epic, Rāmāyana (narrative 4). The literal meaning of Rāmacandra is beautiful moon (*rāma* = beautiful; *candra* = moon)

tummeda: bee (narrative 5)

In all of these songs the lead singer sings one entire line and then the other participants, or the audience repeat the same line. The rhythm of the verse depends on the theme and the context of the performance. Interestingly, all of these poetic narratives are gender specific, that is, they are performed exclusively by women, for women, and are about women. Though some of the narratives are performed during the *gobbi* festival in a ritual context, such as the *gobbi* songs or the songs that have the refrain *gobbiyaḷḷo*, the other songs are performed during agricultural operations carried out by women in nonritual contexts, such as weeding, seeding, or planting seedlings. However, the songs with the refrain *gobbiyaḷḷo* are also performed during agricultural operations, that is, in nonritual contexts, since the singers' bodies are engaged in other work. None of these narratives is genre specific: these narrative songs are also popular in prose form as folktales among the people of that folklore community.

Another interesting observation is that all the poetic narratives that had the refrains *gobbiyaḷḷo*, *rāma tummeda*, *tummeda*, and *Rāmacandra* have a specific meaning. Not simple refrains used to maintain rhythm and rhyme, these words or phrases carry definite significance.

All these verse narratives are women-centered. They are about women's sufferings, cravings, desires, and miseries. Over the long haul, these feelings cannot be kept locked up in their minds and hearts, because they are a source of stress and strain. Women need to vent them for reprieve from the cares of daily life. The crying songs—*Dēvanamma katha* (Tale of Dēvanamma), *Lañjavadina katha* (Tale of the Adulterous Sister-in-law), and *Chellini etiki bali icchina katha* (Tale of the Sister's Sacrifice to the River) had the refrains "bee," "beautiful bee," and *"gobbiyaḷḷo"* respectively. All three are filled with the sufferings and experiences of women who are exploited by patriarchy and the dominant culture. Many of these women have no opportunity to communicate their torment directly to the target audience, be they men or women. They must transmit their message to the world in a subtle manner. Consequently the women turn to inanimate, animate, and superhuman beings as media to communicate their inner thoughts. In these songs the target audiences are not the bees (animal), *Rāmacandra* (a god), or *gobbemma* (a goddess), but the society in which the narrators have been born and brought up. Thus the women in folk poetic narrative tradition deploy the refrains as a strategy to vent their inner emotions to their target audience and hence the use of refrains is highly connotative and denotative.

Tale Number 1: *The Tale of Kāntha and Kāmuḍu (Kāntha Kāmuḍu Katha)*

Kāma, the hero of the poetic narrative, loved Kāntha. He met her regularly in a palace that he had built on the summit of a hill in the midst of a thick forest. Whenever they met, Kāntha would eat the chewed *tamma* (betel leaves, nuts, and lime chewed together) that her lover Kāma had spit out. One day Kāntha went to the palace of her lover a bit late. She saw her lover's spit on a termite mound and ate it. Before she had arrived, however, a snake had vomited its poison on Kāma's spit. When Kāntha reached home she lost consciousness and her seven sisters-in-law reported to her brothers that she had been bitten by a snake. The brothers exclaimed, 'How can a snake bite her, when the fort that was constructed in stone and cement was impregnable and the palace is well-lighted and properly furnished to avoid any poisonous creatures?' They wanted to cremate her, even though she was unconscious but still alive. They prepared curd rice meal by using the milks of goat, buffalo, and cow, and they took dishes of pickled bel fruit, mango, and lime along with them. Along with their wives and their knives, they rode their horses into the forest where they cut the twigs of trees. They ate their food on the bank of the stream Chalamayya Chalama. Seven brothers cut the trees and their wives removed bark. They reached their home. The sisters-in-law ground the bark with oil, ghee, and finally with poison and gave the liquid to Kāntha who was barely conscious. After she had taken one sip, she was on her last breath. Her brothers brought sandalwood for cremation. Somehow, this news reached her lover Kāma. As soon as he heard about the pathetic condition of his love Kāntha, he wanted to go to her. He asked his mother to give him a headbath. His mother refused to send him, since he was not married to her. Kāma ignored his mother and took a headbath and adorned himself with jewels and new clothes. His angry mother cursed him that he should go, but never to come back home. He rode on his horse, followed by his dog to the place where the funeral of his love was taking place. Kāntha, who had been waiting for him, opened her eyes. Kāma inquired in a subtle manner about the whole matter and understood that she had no role in this mishap. She clarified his doubt and took her last

breath. Then he circled her funeral pyre three times and jumped into it. He burned himself in the fire along with her. His horse and dog also followed him.

Tale Number 2: *The Tale of Sister's Sacrifice for the River Goddess (Cellini Ētiki bali icchē Katha)*

Once in a village there were seven brothers and a sister. One day all seven brothers went to a fair at Palamaneru (a village in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh) on bullock carts. They took their oxen and carts. On their way back home, the river Palēru got floodwaters, since all its seven tributary streams rushed into it. The seven brothers appeased the river goddess by promising that they would sacrifice their seven oxen, seven wives, seven children, and their mother and father, if she would lower the floodwaters. The flood did not recede. Then they obliged the river goddess by offering their sister as a sacrifice. To everybody's surprise, the river subsided.

Then they all went home and told their mother, "Give our sister a headbath and adorn her with new clothes and jewels." She replied, "Yesterday itself, she took a headbath and adorned herself with jewels." The seven brothers said to their mother, "Apply turmeric to the new bamboo basket and put vermilion dots on it. Also bring a new earthen pot and decorate it with white dots. We have to offer poñgali[11] to the river Pāleru. Keep the bamboo basket and earthen pot on her head." The sister went first and her brothers and mother followed. The brothers asked their sister, "Put the basket down on the earth and take the earthen pot and fetch some water." She went into the river to bring water. They kept asking their sister to go farther and farther into the water. The water level reached her forehead. She called to her brothers. They did not listen and forced her to go farther and farther. She shouted that the level of water was above her forehead. Finally she realized that they were going to surrender her to the river goddess. Then, she cursed her brothers that their wives' *tāli*[12] would be cut and their children would die. Soon she swallowed water and drowned in the river.

[Rājamma told me that the dying sister's curse stood for her wish for her brothers' and their families' deaths so that their lineage would perish.]

Tale Number 3: *The Tale of the Adulterous Sister-in-law (Lañja vadina Katha)*

The sister-in-law went to fetch water from the stream. There she saw her young charming *maridi* [her husband's younger brother] doing some work, like cutting logs. She dipped the pot into the water and called her *maridi*, "*Maridi*, Mādhavanna, come and lift the pot onto my shoulder." Mādhavanna refused to do so [*because that act is culturally prohibited between a sister-in-law and brother-in-law*. Ed.]. He further tried to convince her, "Sister-in-law, you are the same as my mother. I am not supposed to do this." She grew wild and threatened him. "I will see that your funeral pyre is burnt in remote forests, take care."

She went home. She tore her white sari and blouse. She wounded herself and lay in a corner of the room. She pulled her torn sari over her head as a veil. As soon as her husband Rāmarāju came, she distorted the version and told him that his younger brother Mādhavanna had battered her. He got enraged. The next day, he took some rice in a small bag and left for the forest along with his brother Mādhavanna. After some time Mādhavanna took a nap on the lap of his brother Rāmarāju. Rāmarāju hanged his brother with his long hair. Mādhavanna breathed his last breath. Rāmarāju lit his brother's funeral pyre. Mādhavanna regained consciousness for a moment, revealed the truth, and died. Rāmarāju returned home sadly. He repented that he had killed his brother, his own blood, by listening to the words of his wife who was, after all, a female.

Tale Number 4: *The Tale of a Sister who Drives Away the Doves (Guvvala tōle Chellamma Katha)*

On the bank of a stream, Kāmudu tilled the soil and raised maize. It was the time for reaping. In the field he built a *manche* [watch tower] to guard the crop from birds and thieves. He went home and sent his sister to the fields to drive off the doves and protect the crop. She went to the field with her slingshot and stones and hunted many birds. She brought them home and cooked them deliciously with salt, pepper, and ghee. She also seasoned the cooked food with chilli powder. Her sister-in-law grew jealous of her. She told her husband, "The hunting done by your sister does not appear to have been done by a female, but by some male."

Her brother grew suspicious of his sister and disguised as a *jangama* [a Śaivite mendicant], he followed her and tested her chastity. Finally he said, "Sister, I praise you. I am proud of you. I put a silk garland around your neck as a reward. If I go to Kāṣi,[13] my *karma* [deeds] will be realized. And my sins will be washed off if I dip myself in the sacred waters of Ganga. Rule the kingdom till I return."

Tale Number 5: *The Tale of Dēvanamma (Dēvanamma Katha)*

There were six brothers and a sister. Her name was Dēvanamma. She was newly married and not yet sent to her in-laws' house. She was a very truthful lady. She used to look after the needs of her brothers and parents. Every day, she would take meals to her brothers who were working in the fields. One day she was going to the fields to give food to her brothers. On the way, her sixth brother pulled her sari and outraged her chastity. Her body was wounded and her sari was torn. Her eyes were full of tears. Somehow she reached her other brothers and gave them food. Her eldest brother, Rāmanna asked Dēvanamma, "What is the reason for tears in your eyes? Why are your sari and blouse torn? Why is your body wounded?" Dēvanamma replied, "On my way to the fields, I fell into the shrubs of aisle [*gaccha poda*] and the thorns of babul tree [*tumma mullu*] hurt my head. Flames and fumes from wet fire wood caused tears in my eyes." She returned home and sent a message to her husband by a crow. She warned the crow not to set the letter down to eat fruits or grains on the way and to give it only to her husband and not to her in-laws. Then her husband came to his wife's village. Meanwhile, her brother made all the arrangements to send Dēvanamma to her in-laws' home. All her brothers accompanied the couple up to a certain distance. They asked their last brother to be with her till she reached her in-laws' home. In the forest, she was thirsty. Her husband asked her to take her youngest brother with her and drink some water from a nearby well. She went to the well and drank a handful of water. When she was about to drink again, her brother pushed her into the well and returned home. He convinced his parents and other brothers that his sister had reached her in-laws' place safely. The husband could not find his wife even after he reached home. He

took a headbath and returned to his in-laws' home, although his mother tried to stop him from going on the pretext that the rivers were full of floodwaters. In his in-laws' home he did not see his wife. He decided to return home. On his way, in the forest, he accidentally looked into the well, into which Dēvanamma had been pushed by her brother. There he found a beautiful lotus flower in full bloom and full of fragrance. Dēvanamma had become a lotus flower after she died. She told him what had happened. She said, "Forgive and forget me. I got polluted. Go to your place and live in peace and happiness." Then her husband told her, "I have no life without you," and jumped into the well and died.

IV. Personal and Poetic Narratives: A Point of Convergence

For a long time folklore studies neglected the life experiences of ordinary women in remote villages. In the recent past, researchers have recognized the importance of women's personal narratives (Pentikainen 1987; Abu Lughod 1986). A further stage in the study of women's personal narratives can be achieved by juxtaposing their life experiences with their expressive traditions, such as poetic narratives. The congruent blending of two genres—personal experiences as narratives together with poetic narratives—reveals insights into the textualization process itself in folklore (Kanaka Durga 1999). This phenomenon is crucial for the analysis of women's folklore for several reasons.

1. Personal narratives and folklore genres together become complementary and result in a holistic understanding of folklore.

2. Personal experiences, as lived and narrated, become vital to the perpetuation of folklore tradition.

3. This kind of analysis shows that the perpetuation of folklore is achieved not in a stereotyped manner, but polysemically, leading inevitably to a multiplicity of interpretations of folklore texts and genres.

4. Oral traditions cannot be confined by the principle of simple repetition, for the synthesis of personal experience with traditional text gives birth to new genres and new forms of expression in folklore.

In Rājamma's experience-as-poetic narrative, points of convergence exist at several levels: in the style of performance; in the personality of the narrator in relation to her experience; in her identification with the characters and events of her narratives and narrations; and in the source of strength and the consolation that she derives from the poetic narratives (folklore) themselves in times of distress and hard work in her real life. These are all outlined and analyzed in this section.

I use the concept of convergence here in two ways: first, in terms of finding similarities between events or characters in the personal narrative and those in the poetic narrative, and also in terms of demonstrating the development of the psyche of a woman whose experiences are akin to those in her poetic narratives. Seen in this light, the narrator's psychology represents a point of convergence with the expressive tradition of her folklore community. Hence, convergence here is not used in terms of simple parallelism, which has often been recognized in studies of other cultures. I do not compare two different cultures to understand identities. Instead, I compare the inherited corpus of an individual's folklore repertoire with her present life experiences. Thus I use convergence not as an intercultural concept, but as an intracultural phenomenon.[14]

Style Of Performance

Rājamma's style of rendering her personal narrative and her folk narrative was extemporaneous, continuous, and also humorous. Her voice, guided by emotions, changed according to the change in events in her tales. (Though she had a slight stammer, it never affected the flow of her narration or singing.) Above all, her narration was coherent, meaningful, sequential, articulate, and artistic. In the words of Margaret Trawick (1986: 224), an "artistic act is continuous with an actor's ordinary life and it is a rendition of the greater meaning of life." Rājamma's life, as lived and narrated, made her into a creator of a world of narration. In that world she sought happiness and relief; she used her stories as part of her strategy for survival. Her narration was not at all repetitive. She had an excellent memory. She was clear both about her life events and in the tales she narrated. She cut jokes and spoke humorously to keep her audience alert. Her narration was moderately slow, steady, and uniform. She sometimes paused when she thought that I was unable to follow her narration. During her narrations of both personal experiences and expressive tradition, she could ably shift among the tale world, the story realm, reality, and fantasy. This talent made her performance more lively and meaningful.

Rājamma's narration was rich in proverbs, popular sayings, and figures of speech, using symbols and cultural metaphors in her biographical accounts in the same way that she interwove them in her poetic narratives. For example, she represented her adjustment and compromise with her old husband metaphorically in her statement that "one should drink soup poured into one's own palm." This euphemistic expression artistically presented the worldview of an ordinary villager, a rural female, as one that is beyond the classical Hindu notion of *karma*. The *karma* theory invariably denotes the concept of *punarjañma*. Rājamma's worldview stands for an alternative ideology, which neither points to past acts to account for the present condition nor which predicts the future based on present acts (Ramanujan 1991: 34; O'Flaherty 1980). In the elite version of *karma* and *punarjañma*, there is a continuum among past, present, and future acts. In another metaphorical expression from her personal narrative (section 2), she compared the strained relations between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law to that of the perpetual antagonism between cats and rats or between snakes and the mongoose. Although these animals are categorically separate in the animal world, where they have dominions of their own, the stronger animals, like the cat and mongoose, resort to fighting when they leave their own domains. Similarly mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law need to understand their domains, for then only can they coexist peacefully. If a cat and rat struggle for the same bit of food and if the mongoose and the snake crave the same milk, a fight between them is inevitable. Similarly, when a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law both try to control the same man, a tussle may well result. In her accounts Rājamma explained this phenomenon aptly in symbolic and metaphorical language. In yet another instance she compared her husband's life before she married him to that of a *basivi*. With this comparison, she was expressing the view that her husband had enjoyed a life without responsibilities. The manner in which Rājamma negotiated her life with such a husband subtly suggests the exceptional ability of women in traditional societies to tame unruly husbands.

One motif in Rājamma's poetic narrative, the headbath, seems to have been strongly imprinted on her psyche. In her personal narrative she referred to that motif when her eldest son left for Madras and vanished into thin air. Similarly, the protagonists of tales 1, 2, and 3 had each taken a headbath before being sacrificed, immolated, or killed. These analogies probably supported her graphic memory of events both in her personal life experiences and in sequential incidents in her poetic narrative.

Personality Of Narrator

The personality of the narrator as reflected in her personal narratives as well as in the impressions of her neighbors is of prime importance to locate points of convergence between her personal "self" and her poetic narratives. In her personal narratives she was a protagonist. She narrated her own life in such a way that every character was related to her life experiences. Though female, for much of her life she had to enact a male role, except for gender-specific psychological and biological capacities, such as childbearing. But her role in the performance situation of her own life events appears to have been reversed. In her words, "Though I am a female, I was never considered either by myself or by my parents or by my in-laws as a female. I struggled in the same way a male works for his family. I lived like a *magāmahārāju* [literally, "male emperor" but metaphorically one who makes decisions and dictates terms] ever since my childhood." Her father brought her up as a son, and she was very reluctant to bow her head like a bride at the time of her wedding. From her parental home, she learned to be tough, persistent, and have a steady mind, all of which helped greatly in her in-laws' house. She was not depressed when she realized that she would have to work like a bull in her own family. She managed her family's finances very skillfully by selling milk and dairy products, by participating in agricultural operations, and by opening a grocery shop. She played a decisive role in the family when her husband was old. She did not lose her sense of direction for the sake of pleasures. Further, she never abandoned her duties as a housewife or as a responsible head of the family, despite being left in poverty with an aged husband. After her husband's death, she absorbed her grief and sorrow into her heart for the sake of her children and worked even harder. As there was no responsible male member in their family, she herself settled the family affairs of her daughter and her son-in-law. When her eldest son disappeared and the youngest son died, she suppressed her agony and continued her routine duties. Her balanced conduct made the villagers regard her as someone with the integrated personality of a male, something seen only rarely in females. Everything suggests that circumstances and responsibilities made Rājamma take on the role of a male in her family, a role that made her suppress her feminine feelings and tender thoughts.

In agricultural and pastoral societies, work is not usually gender specific. Males and females share domestic work as well as work outside the house. Rājamma, however, had to carry out duties both at home and in

the fields. Moreover, people around her imputed masculinity to her, noting that she spoke loudly and openly like men with both women and men in the same slang in work environments. She could alter her jargon contextually by substituting cultural metaphors for the most obscene words and expressions in colloquial language. It created an impression among the villagers that she was a *magarāyudu* [a male boss]. Men would naturally be afraid to make advances toward her either as a woman or as a widow. One might well conclude that she voluntarily and consciously forgot her feminine tendencies, since she obviously believed that if she showed womanly timidity, helplessness, and poverty in front of men, they might take an undue interest in her or take advantage of her youth and thus exploit her. Rājamma strategically performed her reversed role in the family by carefully superimposing and internalizing male traits over her "self."

At a deeper level of analysis, Rājamma's personal experiences reveal in her an innocent, home-loving wife, who embodied the qualities of an ideal wife and the traits of a tender mother. In her narration about her wedding, one sees the innocence of child brides of those times who knew nothing about marriage other than purchasing new clothes and jewels. The compromises she made with her old husband demonstrate the wisdom of a housewife who is supposed to be contented with her own possessions, while the way in which she buried passion under household responsibilities and child rearing typifies the perceived nature of women in India. The pains she took to control her grief at the deaths of her two grown-up sons and her efforts to raise her other two children reflect motherly love as well as a mother's responsibility for running a family in the absence of a father. Viewed as a whole, her personality appeared to be split between an innate femininity and a superimposed masculinity, with one taking precedence over the other according to the needs of the moment. To overcome these circumstances and to cope with daily realities, it seems to me that Rājamma cultivated a habit of always being among people with whom she exchanged her tales, songs, and beliefs gathered from other mutual friends and older people. Rājamma herself admitted as much.

In the latter part of her life, Rājamma seems to have adopted the perpetuation of tradition as a way of venting her feelings, desires, cravings, and grievances. In this way, she created a world of tradition, in which she embedded themes, ideas, and events related to her life experiences and to her folklore community.

The tales and the poetic narratives that Rājamma performed were centered around women. Like her, the women in the narratives were pro-

tagonists, either as heroines or as villains to whom all other characters in the narratives were subordinate. In some stories she identified herself with heroines, whereas in others, she showed her concern for female characters who have to struggle hard in their lives. Where there was no possibility for her to identify with a character, she created a wished-for world within which women could escape the exploitation of the dominant culture. Outwardly she sang obscene songs and cut dirty jokes, telling such tales before a restricted audience, although occasionally she did so in a subtle way before or among an open audience. This might have been a way of releasing dormant desires and aspirations for a conjugal life that she had lost at a young age. A close analysis of her poetic narratives reveals virtues and essential traits like chastity, forbearance, and patience in female characters with whom she seemed to identify herself.

Self-Identity Of The Narrator: Her Creations In Poetic Narratives

Narrators and narratives are not separate entities. Narrators live in the narratives they tell, either in disguise or in the overtones used to convey a message to the target audience. Women's personal narratives may thus be seen to share the general function of recapitulation in fictional narratives. Folktales are highly expressive genres that are akin to life situations: individuals often believe that narratives are lived experiences and lives are narrated events, and this belief leads to a convergence of their expressions and their experiences. This phenomenon reveals that genders and genres are closely related and that one transforms the other. Artistic performance is not an object to be studied in isolation, since a performer's life and artistic life are continuous with lived experience (Ramanujan 1986: 33–35; Trawick 1986: 294–344 and 1999: 199; Grima 1991: 78–101). Such articulation is explicit in women's expressive genres such as narratives and especially so in poetic narratives and songs. Rājamma, an active bearer of tradition, keeps tradition alive and passes it on from one generation to the other by constantly sharing her life experiences with her companions. By articulating the events of her life within those of her narratives, Rājamma converged her "self" with her "creations." Ramanujan recounts a similar situation in which an old widow's mental and physical functions deteriorated precisely because she was not able to narrate any of her stories. He points out that "the whole tale is the tale of her acquiring her story, making a person of her, making a silent woman a speaking person" (1991a: 42). Benedicte Grima is of the opinion that fantasy and reality often share

themes, especially when fictional narratives are situated within personal experiences (Grima: 1991). It seems that "normative biological categories such as gender and culturally constructed ones such as genre, are not as taxonomically distinct as one might presume. . . . Finding a personal voice in male-dominated galaxies of possibilities seems to be at the center of female-related gender issues . . ." (Appadurai, Korom, and Mills, 1991: 9). A narrator's nostalgia appears to produce similar events in poetic and personal narratives, which is here evident as Rājamma memorized autobiographical elements and then recited them, thus perpetuating them in the community around her.

Among her poetic narratives, two of Rājamma's songs, "The Tale of an Adulterous Sister-in-law" and "The Tale of the Sister Who Drives Away the Doves," resembled events in her personal life. In her other tales, thoughts and desires for a wished-for world and voices of female sufferings and cravings are evident. Some are crying songs[15] (poetic narratives Numbers 2, 3, and 5), sung with great emotion by the narrator. Although Rājamma did not shed streams of tears, her eyes were wet, her looks humble, and her tone meek, though clear and emotional. While narrating an experience or a poetic narrative, Rājamma got deeply immersed in the performance and the whole performance appeared to me like a reenactment of the events. Her involvement in her performance reflects her nearness to the context of the event that was being described in the narrative, which in turn reflects the way she internalized and converged her experiences and expressions.

In the "Tale of an Adulterous Sister-in-law" the female protagonist, the sister-in-law, has her younger brother-in-law killed by her husband, because he refused to satisfy her passion. She feared that he would reveal the truth and therefore planned to murder him. This is similar to the episode in Rājamma's personal narrative about her older son Dāmōdara. When Dāmōdara saw his employer's wife with her lover in intimate contact, she—fearing that he would tell her husband—slandered him before he could report to her husband. The dialogue between the adulterous sister-in-law and Mādhavanna, the young brother-in-law, is also similar to that of the conversation that had taken place between the Mudaliar's wife and her son Dāmōdara. She thus compared her innocent son Dāmōdara to the similarly wrongly accused Mādhavanna, the adulterous sister-in-law to the Mudaliar's wife, and the Mudaliar to Rāmarāju in the tale. Thus she identified the entire content and context of the poetic narrative with the unexplained disappearance of her son Dāmōdara. Rājamma said that her frequent recitation of this poetic narrative consoled her and reminded her of her lost child.

In "The Tale of the Sister Who Drives Away the Doves" the narrator identified herself with the protagonist of the poetic narrative. In this narrative, the protagonist of the tale takes the role of the protector and caretaker of the crops that are constantly threatened by birds and animals in the field. Similarly, in real life, destiny forced Rājamma to protect and bring up her children on her own. Initially the capabilities of the protagonist are considered suspect, but by the end of the tale she had received her due recognition. Rājamma, while explaining her experiences, also spelled out her situation as a young widow, when she was subject to rumors and assaults. Looking back from the vantage point of a sixty-year-old woman, she felt a sense of satisfaction in having fulfilled her duties as a mother. Even when her own daughter-in-law attempted to assassinate her character, the villagers, including her own son, came to her rescue. This she considered a reward for her selfless efforts in protecting and rearing her family, just like those of the protagonist in her narrative, who was rewarded at the end by her brother. The narrator was obviously fascinated by this poetic narrative, and her tone evinced a deep sense of pride and courage when she performed it.

Rājamma had a great concern for the sufferings of women in their relations with men, whether brothers, husbands, or fathers. She wished that men could be more cordial and understanding toward women in society. Though she did not identify herself directly with any of the female characters in "The Tale of Kāntha and Kāmuḍu," "The Tale of Dēvanamma," or "The Tale of the Sister's Sacrifice to the River," her expectations and worldview about men, marriage, love, sex, and interrelationships among in-laws, siblings, and parents were reflected there. Exploitation of women in inter- and intragender relationships within a family system were well expressed by Rājamma through these narratives. The narrator's feelings about the exploitation of women, both physical and psychological, in a male-dominated society as well as her desire for change in the attitudes of women and men about chastity and morals, were projected subtly in her poetic narratives. She aspired, through her narratives, to gender equality.

Rājamma felt that a wife or a female should always be with her husband, despite old age, poverty, or any other disability. Her fear of her old husband had once led her aunt and a neighbor to suspect her character, which in turn compelled her to compromise and to realize that she should be satisfied with what she was given. She suggested that it was proper for women to be at their in-laws' place, and not with their parents, once they married. A married woman lives and dies in her husband's home. If a

woman remains in her parents' family after her marriage, it might unavoidably lead to unwanted circumstances and miseries, views that were illustrated in her "Tale of Dēvanamma," where a female protagonist was raped by her own brother and in "The Tale of Kāntha and Kāmuḍu," where Kāntha died from snake venom when she went to meet her lover. In both tales, Rājamma portrayed a man who differed significantly from the stereotypical behavior of male figures who might suspect or desert or kill or torture a female for any number of reasons. On the other hand, Dēvanamma's husband immolated himself because he couldn't live without his wife. His readiness to end his life, even after hearing about the incest she had suffered, reflected his understanding that his wife had had no voluntary role in this sin. In the same way, in Kāntha and Kāma's love episode, the sacrifice of Kāma, his horse, and his dog in the funeral pyre of his beloved Kāntha was also felt very emotionally by the narrator. Rājamma appeared to accentuate the concept of monogamy in her poetic narrative.

Rājamma seemed to inject herself into the roles of the males who sacrificed their lives for their women: her desire to be with her husband in life and in death, her concept of marriage and of the sanctity of conjugal life, and her view of the oneness of husband and wife are manifested in the two tales discussed above through the sacrifice of the males with whom she identified. The exploitation of women by siblings, especially in "The Tale of Dēvanamma" (sexual exploitation) and "The Tale of the Sister's Sacrifice to the River" (causing involuntary sacrifice) clearly represents victimization, particularly so when a sister's sacrifice is for brothers' prosperity. Rājamma registered her protest in the sister's dying curse, which expresses the grievances of unmarried women at the lack of protection, security, and identity in society. Rājamma's tone in both her poetic and personal narratives manifests the longing of the women for an identity of their own and for appreciation in a male-dominated society.

Conclusions

Rājamma was split between responsibilities and sensibilities. Responsibility made her take on a male role in order to earn a living and to look after her family, while her sensibilities led her to create a domestic domain like that of a married woman. All her poetic narratives and tales are woman-centered with female protagonists. Her caste and profession

enabled her to learn an increasing number of poetic narratives and social traditions from other members of her society, as she herself noted in her personal narratives. She boldly asserted that she performed her songs and narratives and participated in village women's festivals in order to divert herself and other women from routine life with its suffering and boredom. Circumstances had forced (or induced) her to be an active bearer and disseminator of narrative tradition.

Although Rājamma had a very large folklore repertoire, she performed and perpetuated only a few narratives, which she would sing whenever anybody asked her to do so. This fact raises important issues about performers and performance. Why does a performer (or narrator or anybody) remember and perpetuate some narratives and not others? A simple answer to this question may be because he or she especially likes a particular form or tale. If so, why are certain motifs imprinted in the memory, while others fade away or are shrouded in obscurity? The nearness and inseparability of the narrator's life experiences, events, characters, relations, and feelings to similar ones in folk narratives is one cause for memorizing and perpetuating certain motifs. Rājamma's preferences seemed to be reflected in her narrative tradition; personal feelings and passions which could not be realized in her life as a widow took shape as fantasy in her narratives and songs. Her folksong repertoire contained much that was erotic, sensuous, and love-centered, suggesting that she sought relief from the tension and stress created by the lack of a male companion and the interruption of her conjugal life.

Rājamma seemed to envision a society in which the value system superimposed on women might be reversed. She seemed to expect that conjugal life should be based on mutual understanding and that it should involve sharing rather than men's exploitation of women. She fantasized a world where a man might sacrifice or immolate himself for the sake of a woman. Rājamma's narratives demonstrated the cravings of a woman for identity and for a nonsexist appraisal of her voluntary and selfless services in married life and family. Rājamma adopted a narrator's voice in order to bridge the gulf created by these split roles. The dissemination and perpetuation of folklore genres by an individual in a folklore community can thus be understood only when one juxtaposes them with the personal narratives of that individual. The cultural meanings and dynamics of folklore expressions can only be properly appreciated when they are contextualized within the personal life experiences of the individual who produces them.

Appendix A

Translations of the Texts of Rājamma's Poetic Narratives

1. "The Tale Of Kāntha And Kāmuḍu"

1. Goddess Gobbi, who broke the hill on the other side?
2. Goddess Gobbi, who built the house amid the forest?
3. Goddess Gobbi, who bent the flower-bearing twig?
4. Goddess Gobbi, who spit the *tamma*?[16]
5. Goddess Gobbi, I broke the hill.
6. Goddess Gobbi, I built the house amid the forest.
7. Goddess Gobbi, I myself spit *tamma* on the anthill.
8. Goddess Gobbi, Kāntha ate it, because it is of Kāma.
9. Goddess Gobbi, Kāntha became unconscious due to poisoning
10. Goddess Gobbi, King of kings, who sits in the village assembly?
11. Goddess Gobbi, a snake bit your sister.
12. Goddess Gobbi, the day before yesterday's construction was done by stone
13. Goddess Gobbi, previous day's construction was done by cement.
14. Goddess Gobbi, how could a snake enter the fort, when it is impregnable to even an ant?
15. Goddess Gobbi, how could an ant enter the fort, when it is impregnable to even a snake?
16. Goddess Gobbi, the building is lighted in four directions and a smooth bed is spread in the middle of the room
17. Goddess Gobbi, how could a snake bite our sister?
18. Goddess Gobbi, the snake that is bent near the pot of nuts
19. Goddess Gobbi, the snake that is found pressed near the pot of betel leaves
20. Goddess Gobbi, the snake looked at the lime pot

21. Goddess Gobbi, the snake sleeping beneath the pot of tobacco
22. Goddess Gobbi, when she tried to pick it up, thinking that it was a nut, the snake bit her suddenly
23. Goddess Gobbi, when she tried to pick it up, thinking that it was a betel leaf, the snake bit her harshly
24. Goddess Gobbi, when she tried to pick it up, thinking that it was a lime, the snake bit her deeply.
25. Goddess Gobbi, when she tried to pick it up, thinking that it was a tobacco leaf, the snake bit her speedily.
26. Goddess Gobbi, King of kings, who sit in the village assembly,
27. Goddess Gobbi, your sister is bitten by a snake, come over here
28. Goddess Gobbi, seven brothers came from their office
29. Goddess Gobbi, they cooked a *putti*[17] of rice as *chaddi*
30. Goddess Gobbi, when goat's curd was added, the *chaddi* became oily
31. Goddess Gobbi, when buffalo's curd was added, it became soupy
32. Goddess Gobbi, when cow's curd was added, it became tasty.
33. Goddess Gobbi, what pickle is needed for that *chaddi*?
34. Goddess Gobbi, the pickle of bel fruit, soaked in snow
35. Goddess Gobbi, the pickle of mango soaked in pot
36. Goddess Gobbi, the pickle of lemon soaked in water
37. Goddess Gobbi, food, as small as that of a pearl is tied to the fore end of the upper cloth
38. Goddess Gobbi, food, as small as that of coral is tied to the hind end of the upper cloth
39. Goddess Gobbi, the seven brothers mounted their horses
40. Goddess Gobbi, seven brothers took axes
41. Goddess Gobbi, seven sisters-in-law took seven knives
42. Goddess Gobbi, the horses rose to sky-high
43. Goddess Gobbi, the horses created dust in the sky

44. Goddess Gobbi, they crossed a forest, impassable even to crows
45. Goddess Gobbi, they crossed the forest, impregnable impassable even to ants
46. Goddess Gobbi, the horses reached the pond of Chalamayya
47. Goddess Gobbi, near the pond of Chalamayya, they ate their lunch
48. Goddess Gobbi, the cloth in which food was packed was left in waters
49. Goddess Gobbi, seven brothers uprooted the trees
50. Goddess Gobbi, seven sisters-in-law removed the bark of the trees.
51. Goddess Gobbi, all of them came to Nāgiri[18]
52. Goddess Gobbi, one sister-in-law ground the bark with oil
53. Goddess Gobbi, another sister-in-law ground it with milk
54. Goddess Gobbi, another sister-in-law ground it with ghee
55. Goddess Gobbi, the eldest sister-in-law ground it with poison
56. Goddess Gobbi, when poured speedily, Kāntha opened her eyes
57. Goddess Gobbi, when poured harshly, she opened her mouth and teeth
58. Goddess Gobbi, she was on the verge of collapse
59. Goddess Gobbi, her brothers ordered cremation
60. Goddess Gobbi, they brought sandalwood as firewood
61. Goddess Gobbi, somebody carried the message to Kāma
62. Goddess Gobbi, Mother Srīdevi, give me a headbath
63. Goddess Gobbi, just yesterday you took a headbath. Why today?
64. Goddess Gobbi, today I want a ghee bath.
65. Goddess Gobbi, oil is taken from big vessel into small vessel
66. Goddess Gobbi, from small vessel into smallest vessel, the oil is taken
67. Goddess Gobbi, the oil in the smallest vessel is poured on his head.
68. Goddess Gobbi, he poured water on his body by a tumbler studded with pearls, for the first time

69. Goddess Gobbi, then poured water on his body by a tumbler studded with corals
70. Goddess Gobbi, he put rings to his fingers
71. Goddess Gobbi, he applied vermilion mark on his forehead
72. Goddess Gobbi, he put on his shoes
73. Goddess Gobbi, he put on new clothes
74. Goddess Gobbi, he also put on a head dress
75. Goddess Gobbi, Mother, I am leaving, give me your blessings
76. Goddess Gobbi, have you tied sacred thread and had relations with her?
77. Goddess Gobbi, don't have relations with women
78. Goddess Gobbi, consider that the sacred thread is tied and relations had.
79. Goddess Gobbi, I want to have relations with a woman.
80. Goddess Gobbi, have you exchanged rings and gone in procession in palanquin?
81. Goddess Gobbi, don't have relations with women.
82. Goddess Gobbi, consider that I have exchanged rings and gone in palanquin.
83. Goddess Gobbi, I want to have life with a woman.
84. Goddess Gobbi, have you tied *bāsikam*[19] and enjoyed her?
85. Goddess Gobbi, don't have relations with women.
86. Goddess Gobbi, consider that I have tied *bāsikam* and enjoyed her
87. Goddess Gobbi, I want relations with a woman
88. Goddess Gobbi, give me your blessings to leave for her.
89. Goddess Gobbi, the mother told him to go but not to return.
90. Goddess Gobbi, Kāma rode his red horse
91. Goddess Gobbi, he jumped his horse and raised dust on earth
92. Goddess Gobbi, he made his horse jump sky high
93. Goddess Gobbi, the horse reached the funeral pyre of Kāntha

94. Goddess Gobbi, an innocent girl! One who drives the birds in fields

95. Goddess Gobbi, don't have relations with women.

96. Goddess Gobbi, have you ever opened the space between your breasts to anybody?

97. Goddess Gobbi, I never drove birds or opened the space between my breasts to anybody.

98. Goddess Gobbi, a treacherous girl, who drives the birds in the fields,

99. Goddess Gobbi, have you ever opened the space between your breasts to anybody?

100. Goddess Gobbi, I never drove the birds in the fields and I never betrayed anybody

101. Goddess Gobbi, the space between my breasts is not yet opened to anybody.

102. Goddess Gobbi, Kāma turned thrice around her funeral pyre

103. Goddess Gobbi, Kāma jumped into the pyre of Kāntha

104. Goddess Gobbi, his horse jumped into the pyre

105. Goddess Gobbi, his dog also jumped into the pyre and reached her master and mistress.

2. *"The Tale Of The Sister's Sacrifice To The River"*

    1. Goddess Gobbi, my seven brothers went to purchase oxen

    2. Goddess Gobbi, my seven brothers went to the fair at Palamaneru

    3. Goddess Gobbi, they adorned the humps of the oxen by cloth on which lavender-colored mirrors are stitched

    4. Goddess Gobbi, they tied bells to the legs of oxen

    5. Goddess Gobbi, they adorned the horns of the oxen with horncaps

    6. Goddess Gobbi, they took seven carts on their way home.

    7. Goddess Gobbi, the river Pāleru, joined together by seven streams, was advancing.

8. Goddess Gobbi, we will give our seven oxen, lower your waters, Pāleru River!
9. Goddess Gobbi, we will give our seven brothers, lower your waters, Pāleru River!
10. Goddess Gobbi, we will give our seven wives, lower your waters, Pāleru River!
11. Goddess Gobbi, we will give seven children, lower your waters, Pāleru River!
12. Goddess Gobbi, we will give our father and mother, lower your waters, Pāleru River!
13. Goddess Gobbi, we will give our sister, lower your waters, Pāleru River!
14. Goddess Gobbi, then the River Pāleru lowered its waters immediately.
15. Goddess Gobbi, they along with their carts returned home.
16. Goddess Gobbi, Mother, call our sister and give her a headbath.
17. Goddess Gobbi, just yesterday I gave her a headbath. Why today?
18. Goddess Gobbi, call our sister and adorn her with jewels.
19. Goddess Gobbi, just yesterday she wore her jewels. Why today?
20. Goddess Gobbi, apply turmeric to new bamboo basket
21. Goddess Gobbi, put vermilion to the new bamboo basket
22. Goddess Gobbi, put spots of lime, turmeric, and vermilion to new earthen pot
23. Goddess Gobbi, we have to offer *poñgali* to the bund of the river Pāleru.
24. Goddess Gobbi, the sister left for the river and the brothers followed her
25. Goddess Gobbi, the sister led the group and the mother followed her.
26. Goddess Gobbi, put the basket down and bring water in pot
27. Goddess Gobbi, the waters to the river began to flow like blood.

28. Goddess Gobbi, water is up to the level of my feet, shall I bring water?
29. Goddess Gobbi, go farther, you are good.
30. Goddess Gobbi, if you speak like that, how is it possible?
31. Goddess Gobbi, the water is reaching my girdle, shall I bring water?
32. Goddess Gobbi, go farther, you are good.
33. Goddess Gobbi, the level of water is up to my neck, shall I bring water?
34. Goddess Gobbi, go farther deep, you are good.
35. Goddess Gobbi, water is reaching to the height of my forehead. Shall I bring water?
36. Goddess Gobbi, go deeper, you are good.
37. Goddess Gobbi, I will go assuming that your wives' sacred thread [*tāli*] is cut and drowned in waters.
38. Goddess Gobbi, I will drown by assuming that your children are dead.

3. *"The Tale Of An Adulterous Sister-In-Law"*

1. Very hastily picked up the water pot, beautiful bee
2. Mother-in-law, I will go to fetch water, beautiful bee
3. Why should you go to fetch water, beautiful bee
4. Why are you so anxious to go? beautiful bee
5. She did not listen to the mother-in-law, beautiful bee
6. She reached the well, beautiful bee
7. She pushed the wave and dipped the pot in water, beautiful bee
8. She kept the pot in front of her, beautiful bee
9. She looked around, beautiful bee
10. She saw her younger brother-in-law, beautiful bee
11. Who is there? Mādhavanna, beautiful bee

12. Come and lift the pot to my shoulder, beautiful bee
13. Are you my older brother's wife? beautiful bee
14. Have you not been born along with your older brother? beautiful bee
15. Lift the water pot to my shoulders, beautiful bee
16. You are like my mother and an alternate form of my mother, beautiful bee
17. I am not supposed to touch you, beautiful bee
18. Do as you like, beautiful bee
19. Amid the remote forests, beautiful bee
20. I will burn your funeral pyre, beautiful bee
21. She wore white sari and pulled a veil over her head, beautiful bee
22. She broke her bangles, beautiful bee
23. She wounded her body herself, beautiful bee
24. She lay in a corner of her room, beautiful bee
25. Her husband Rāmarāju came, beautiful bee
26. What happened to your body, asked Rāmarāju, beautiful bee
27. Who is that Mādhavanna, beautiful bee
28. He squeezed my body, beautiful bee
29. Rāmarāju took rice and packed it, beautiful bee
30. Mādhavanna led to the forest, beautiful bee
31. Rāmarāju followed him, beautiful bee
32. Amid the forest, Rāmarāju stretched his leg, beautiful bee
33. Mādhavanna slept on the thigh of Rāmarāju, beautiful bee
34. Rāmarāju killed the lice in the hair of Mādhavanna, beautiful bee
35. When measured, it was seven fathoms, beautiful bee
36. Mādhavanna's hair, beautiful bee
37. His life was on the verge of last breath, beautiful bee
38. He told the truth before he died, beautiful bee

39. I listened to the bitch, beautiful bee
40. I have destroyed my shareholder, beautiful bee
41. I listened to the words of my wife, beautiful bee
42. I killed my own brother, beautiful bee.

4. *"The Tale Of A Sister Who Drives Away Doves"*

1. Ramachandra, who tills the land near the stream? Ramachandra
2. Ramachandra, Kāma tilled the land near the stream, Ramachandra
3. Ramachandra, Kāma went home, Ramachandra
4. Ramachandra, Mother who gave birth to me, Ramachandra
5. Ramachandra, the crops of sorghum are ready, Ramachandra
6. Ramachandra, Kāma reached field, Ramachandra
7. Ramachandra, fixed one plow in one way, Ramachandra
8. Ramachandra, fixed two poles in two ways, Ramachandra
9. Ramachandra, cot is prepared with mango wood, Ramachandra
10. Ramachandra, fixed central pole, Ramachandra
11. Ramachandra, Kāma went home, Ramachandra
12. Ramachandra, Mother who gave birth to me, Ramachandra
13. Ramachandra, whom should we send to field, Ramachandra
14. Ramachandra, send your sister to field, Ramachandra
15. Ramachandra, she took golden pebbles and catapult, Ramachandra
16. Ramachandra, the sister left for field, Ramachandra
17. Ramachandra, she climbed the *manche* [watch tower], Ramachandra
18. Ramachandra, she shot the dove which is as high as buffalo, Ramachandra
19. Ramachandra, she drove birds one side and shot them, Ramachandra
20. Ramachandra, she shot birds which are escaping, Ramachandra

21. Ramachandra, she tied three birds in a bunch, Ramachandra
22. Ramachandra, she came home, Ramachandra
23. Ramachandra, Mother, who gave birth to me, Ramachandra
24. Ramachandra, she cooked them in ghee, Ramachandra
25. Ramachandra, she roasted them in pepper and chili powder, Ramachandra
26. Ramachandra, the sister went to field, Ramachandra
27. Ramachandra, Kāma went to field, Ramachandra
28. Ramachandra, King of kings, who sit amid the house, Ramachandra
29. Ramachandra, this hunting is not similar to that of the women's hunting, Ramachandra
30. Ramachandra, this hunting is done by men, Ramachandra
31. Ramachandra, he opened his pocket, by ashes near butter tree, Ramachandra
32. Ramachandra, he put several varieties of dresses, Ramachandra
33. Ramachandra, he took the guise of a *jangam*, Ramachandra
34. Ramachandra, Kāma went to the field, Ramachandra
35. Ramachandra, do you know the route to Guriginjapattanam? Ramachandra
36. Ramachandra, I don't know either Guriginaja pattanam or Gutti, Ramachandra
37. Ramachandra, stand beyond the bars of scaffold, Ramachandra
38. Ramachandra, why should I stand beyond scaffold? Ramachandra
39. Ramachandra, I don't know anything. Why did you come? Ramachandra
40. Ramachandra, how to approach Kāvūr City? Ramachandra
41. Ramachandra, I don't know either Kāvūr or Gasti, Ramachandra
42. Ramachandra, Why did you come? Ramachandra
43. Ramachandra, I came to sit on chair beside you, Ramachandra

44. Ramachandra, I came to reach on the scaffold and speak to you, Ramachandra
45. Ramachandra, see that side, my brother is Arjuna,[20] Ramachandra
46. Ramachandra, my mother is quarrelsome, Ramachandra
47. Ramachandra, my mother beats you by stones, Ramachandra
48. Ramachandra, I praise you sister, I appraise you, Ramachandra
49. Ramachandra, I honor you with a silk garland, Ramachandra
50. Ramachandra, climb and ride my horse, Ramachandra
51. Ramachandra, you rule the kingdom of mine, Ramachandra
52. Ramachandra, if I go to Kāśi, my deed will be realized, Ramachandra
53. Ramachandra, if I dip in the sacred waters of Ganga, my sins will be washed off, Ramachandra

5. *"The Tale Of Dēvanamma"*

In the poetic narrative, each line ends with tummeda [bee]

1. Six brothers, eldest being Rāmanna, tummeda
2. Truthful Dēvanamma, tummeda
3. Got up early in the morning, tummeda
4. Her six brothers, tummeda
5. Took their ploughs, tummeda
6. They ran to the fields, tummeda
7. She sprinkled cow dung water in her courtyard, tummeda
8. She put beautiful colam on the floor, tummeda
9. She took the pot, tummeda
10. Fetched water from the well, tummeda
11. She poured water in the tub, tummeda
12. She cooked the meals, tummeda
13. She washed the pots of buttermilk, tummeda

14. Dēvanamma put it in the hall, tummeda
15. She washed the pots of curry, tummeda
16. She put it in the hall, tummeda
17. She washed the pots of curry, tummeda
18. She took a mirror into her hands, tummeda
19. She plaited her hair, tummeda
20. She put a vermilion mark on her forehead, tummeda
21. She prepared a disk with cloth on her head, tummeda
22. She arranged the basket containing the lunch for her brothers, tummeda
23. She was going to the field, tummeda
24. Among the six brothers, tummeda
25. The last among her six brothers, tummeda
26. He pulled her sari, tummeda
27. Squeezed her, tummeda
28. Spoiled her entire body, tummeda
29. He tore her blouse, tummeda
30. Tears were flowing from her eyes, tummeda
31. Truthful Dēvanamma, tummeda
32. Somehow she reached the field, tummeda
33. Her six brothers, tummeda
34. Drank and ate food, tummeda
35. What is coming from your eyes? tummeda
36. What is the reason for it? tummeda
37. Undried firewood, tummeda
38. Created fumes and caused tears in my eyes, tummeda
39. Why the sari and blouse are torn? tummeda
40. On the way to the field, tummeda
41. I fell in the shrubs on the path, tummeda

42. When I tried to come out of it, tummeda
43. The thorns of babul tree fell on me, tummeda
44. She reached her home, tummeda
45. She wrote a letter to her husband, tummeda
46. She wrote a letter to the town of her mother-in-law, tummeda
47. She called a crow and gave letter to it, tummeda
48. On your way to the town, tummeda
49. There is a tree of mimusops, tummeda
50. For the want of mimusops fruits, tummeda
51. Don't put the letter down, tummeda
52. If you go farther, tummeda
53. You can see the millet crops, tummeda
54. For the want of millets, tummeda
55. Don't set the letter on the ground, tummeda
56. If you go farther, there is crop of bengal grams, tummeda
57. For the want of grams, tummeda
58. Don't put the letter on the ground, tummeda
59. On your way to my mother-in-law's home, tummeda
60. There are fruit-bearing trees, tummeda
61. For the want of fruits, tummeda
62. Don't set the letter down on the earth, tummeda
63. If my mother-in-law comes, tummeda
64. Don't give her my letter, tummeda
65. If my husband comes out, tummeda
66. Give him my letter, tummeda
67. The crow looked at his coming, tummeda
68. He read the letter, tummeda
69. He asked his mother, tummeda

70. I have to go to my mother-in-law's home, tummeda
71. What is the reason for your going, tummeda
72. The stream on your way is overflowing, tummeda
73. If you tell me to go, I will go, tummeda
74. If you tell me not to go, I will go, tummeda
75. To the town of his mother-in-law, tummeda
76. He went and reached the place, tummeda
77. Five of her brothers and the eldest Rāmanna, tummeda
78. Brought her sari and blouse, tummeda
79. Arranged all paraphernalia, tummeda
80. They prepared seven carts, tummeda
81. They crossed the crow forest, tummeda
82. They also crossed the stream, tummeda
83. Further they also crossed another forest, tummeda
84. Dēvanamma told her husband that she is thirsty, tummeda
85. Take your last brother and drink water, tummeda
86. Dēvanamma and her last brother went, tummeda
87. They reached the well, tummeda
88. Dēvanamma reached the well, tummeda
89. She drank handful of water, tummeda
90. Her last brother pushed her into the well, tummeda
91. Truthful Dēvanamma, tummeda
92. Fell into the waters of the well, tummeda
93. Her last brother crossed all the forests, tummeda
94. Reached his home, tummeda
95. How did you come so early? tummeda
96. Have you gone to the city of our sister? tummeda
97. The sister and husband, tummeda

98. Did they reach safely? tummeda
99. Till they reached their home, tummeda
100. I was there and returned after they reached, tummeda
101. Among six brothers, tummeda
102. The youngest of all, tummeda
103. Told these words, tummeda
104. Reached already, tummeda
105. Dēvanamma's husband reached home, tummeda
106. He reached his town, tummeda
107. Why are you coming, my son? tummeda
108. Where is our daughter-in-law? tummeda
109. They are coming slowly, tummeda
110. They did not come, tummeda
111. He took a headbath, tummeda
112. He returned to his in-laws' home, tummeda
113. He reached the home, tummeda
114. Truthful Dēvanamma, tummeda
115. She did not come there, tummeda
116. Six of her brothers, tummeda
117. Amazed at the event, tummeda
118. He was on his way to his town, tummeda
119. He looked into the well, tummeda
120. He peeped into the well, tummeda
121. She took the form of a lotus flower, tummeda
122. Truthful Dēvanamma, tummeda
123. Became a lotus flower, tummeda
124. Then what do you say? tummeda
125. I was polluted, tummeda

126. You, be safe and happy, tummeda

127. Go to your place, tummeda

128. Live happily, tummeda

129. Forget me and our relationship, tummeda

130. I have no life without you, tummeda

131. He looked in and around, tummeda

132. He jumped into the well, tummeda

133. He reached his wife, tummeda

Notes

1. The *gobbi panḍuga* [the festival of gobbi] is exclusively celebrated by unwidowed women for the longevity of their husbands, or the begetting of children, and by unmarried women who seek prospective bridegrooms. The ritual is performed in the month of *dhanurmāsa*, which corresponds roughly to the period between December 15 and January 15. This is a very important season for peasant families, since new harvests reach their homes at this time. Every year during this period, young girls collect thick cow dung and prepare balls from it, adorn them with beautiful flowers such as marigolds and chrysanthemums, put dots of vermilion and turmeric and rice flour on them and keep them on the *muggu* [auspicious floor designs] drawn in front of the main gate of the house every morning. In the evening, before sunset, the *gobbi* are removed and are stuck to the walls. These cowdung balls are called *gobbemmallu*. This is observed throughout the ritual period.

Before the end of the *dhanurmāsa*, young girls in the village form groups and arrange *sanḍe gobbemma* [cow-dung balls] in the evenings. For this, girls collect cow dung and adorn it like the *gobbemmalu* and put it on an elevated wooden pedestal, which is also purified and decorated with turmeric, vermilion, and rice flour. A lamp is lit in an earthen plate (*pramide*) and sandal sticks are burned. Then the girls and the young women form circles and move rhythmically and clap, accompanied by the songs that have the refrain, *gobbiyaḷḷo*. After the ritual is over, the girls offer cooked and fried bengal grams, bananas, soaked split green grams [*vaḍapappu*], jaggery (crude sugar blocks made by processing sugar cane juice), water mixed with pepper, and elaichi powders [*pānākam*]. Coconut is broken, *naivēdya* [sacred food] is offered, and camphor is lit. Then the participants share the *prasādamu* [the

sanctified offerings], take the *saṇḍe gobbemma* in a bamboo basket, kept usually on the head of an elderly woman, and go to a local stream. There they leave it in the water and see that it floats. Then they return home.

2. The *nāyuḍu* is an honorific title held by rich peasants in communities like *Kammās* and *Velamās,* the powerful landed aristocracy of the medieval period in Andhra Pradesh. The *nāyuḍu* is derived from the word *Nāyakuḍu,* which means a leader. According to Rājamma's explanation, members of the caste society who do agriculture on the land conferred by the landlord like *Jamindars* can hold the title.

3. The *paṭṭa* is a document stating the extent of a peasant's land. The *nāyuḍupaṭṭa* is the landholding (*paṭṭa*) of the *nāyudu.*

4. Rājamma told me that the act of keeping the right hand of the bride in the pot of pulses and salt meant that a woman, the boss of the kitchen, should always keep in view the proper supplies of kitchen provisions. It is a symbolic act enacted at the time of marriage to show the bride her place as a housewife and to fix her domain in her new family.

5. Sacred thread tied to women at the time of wedding, a thread to which turmeric is applied and gold disks, the *mañgaḷasutras,* are attached.

6. A *Śaivite* mendicant with no responsibilities who lives from the kindness of the villagers. Literally, a *basivi* is a *devara dunnapōtu,* a sacrificial bull marked and dedicated to a god or goddess. It has religious sanction to roam freely, to eat everywhere, and to sleep anywhere.

7. Having a headbath, a purificatory ceremony, either ritualistically with oil, shampoo, nuts, sandal paste, and the powder of greengram, blackgram, and so on or simply with cold water is compulsory for those preparing to participate in or to conduct sacred rituals. Before undergoing immolation rituals like "sati," the ritual participant takes the elaborate bath. But those who conduct the rituals, who cremate the bodies, for example, are required only to take a simple cold water headbath before and after the ritual.

8. The *jangama,* which literally means "movable and not stationary," is applied to *Śaivite* mendicants who circulate in the villages for the propagation of Vīraśaivism. The nonbrahman converts of *Vīraśaivism* are *jangamas* or *Lingāyats,* whereas the brahman converts of *Arādhya Saivism* are called *Arādhyas.* See Rao 1973, Lorenzen 1972, Nandimath 1944.

9. *Ambali* is a semiliquid soup made of rice mixed with buttermilk, salt, and pepper powder.

10. The *chaddi* or *saddi* is prepared from cooked rice left over from the previous night to which curd or buttermilk and salt are added. It is taken as lunch for the next day when grazing the cattle. The villagers also eat the same food as breakfast. *Chaddi* is a poor person's meal.

11. Rājamma told me that the *poñgali* is a sacred food prepared by boiling rice, split green grams, and jaggery in milk in a new earthen or brass vessel to be offered to the village goddesses. Brown (1966: 701) describes the word *Poñgali peṭṭu* (offering rice boiled in milk) instead of a bloody sacrifice as propitiation to the village goddess. Here, in this poetic narrative, brothers taking their sister to the riverbank to offer sacred food, metaphorically suggests that she is being sacrificed to the river goddess (instead of fowl or cattle).

12. Also called mañgaḷasūtrās, these are gold disks tied to a thread at the time of marriage and worn by married women).

13. Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.

14. The concept of convergence is often used in the theory of limited possibilities to study similarities in different cultures and to find out whether their sameness results from diffusion or from psychic unity. If the similarities are superficial, one speaks of spurious convergence, and when the similarities are found to be identical, not only in physical but also in psychological terms, they can be understood as genuine convergence. See Lowie 1912, Goldenweiser 1913, Burns 1989.

15. According to Margaret T. Egnor, in "crying songs," "the singer weeps as she sings; tears stream down her face; her voice rises in pitch and volume with each line of the song, like a wail, and then falls and trails off. Yet her eyes are open, and her words are clear. Ordinarily, a crying song represents some grievance the singer has against some particular person of higher status than herself, though the songs may be sometimes directed against the world at large" (Egnor 1986: 297).

16. *Tamma* is a pulp formed by chewing betel leaves, nuts, and lime together. The act of eating this male-chewed pulp by a female, and vice versa, indicates the extent of love and intimacy between a couple.

17. *Putti* is an Indian measure of grains that is roughly equivalent to 480 kilograms. It is also used as a measure of land, a *putti* of which gives the same amount of produce.

18. Nagiri is a place in Chittoor district and is presently a tāluk headquarters. Indian states are divided into districts, which are further divided into tāluks. A tāluk is a small administrative unit in the Indian geo-political structure.

19. *Bāsikam* is a nuptial crown worn on the foreheads of the bride and bridegroom at the time of marriage.

20. Arjuna is the third of the Pāndavās of Mahābhārata, who was proficient in archery. He is considered a hero of the Mahābhārata.

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Afterword

RUTH B. BOTTIGHEIMER

This book has taken me far from my usual subjects—European fairy tales, British children's literature, and Bible stories—even though it began in the heart of Europe. The 1992 Innsbruck meeting of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research was devoted to "Folk Narrative and Worldview." Many women felt keenly the absence of gender as an analytical category, and so a small group of about ten women developed an agenda for the next scheduled meeting of the ISFNR, to be held in Mysore in southern India in 1995. It must—the women concluded—include gender as a significant component.

I suppose I spoke most ardently, or perhaps simply loudest, because I ended up in the organizational seat. I sifted through European and American proposals, and in India Lalita Handoo handled the Indian side. Together we set up the sessions. What emerged was a vibrant program of papers that explored everything from gripping South Slavic songs about immured women to female figures in Jataka stories, including Lalita's own paper about son-in-law stories, Lakshmi Narasamamba's Muslim women storytellers, Kanaka Durga's Rajamma, and Saraswathi Venugopal's Tamil storytellers and listeners.

At the conference the rooms were jammed with spellbound listeners. Discussion was intense. Gender had struck a chord that resonated powerfully with everyone there, men as well as women. And each day more and more people came to the gender sessions.

After the conference, Lalita Handoo and I edited the papers for publication by Zooni Publications in Mysore. Her name on the title page reflects her contribution at that important point. This extraordinary body of material

could not be made available for readers in the West because Zooni had no formal distribution arrangements outside India. However, the situation turned out to be providential because it allowed for a significantly revised presentation of fieldwork material in this volume and gave the authors the opportunity to substantially update their essays in the light of their own newer fieldwork and broader scholarship. Given the enormous difficulties of accessing the necessary library resources and the challenges of cross-continent communication when e-mail access was still not dependable, Leela Prasad's role became vital in facilitating this revision process. Organizing, editing, and bringing these essays to publication has been a complex and complicated project. Nancy Ellegate at State University of New York Press has encouraged the project over the several years it has taken to bring it about; the Press's outside readers have provided invaluable guidance. To them and to Leela Prasad, without whom this book would not have been possible, I extend warm and heartfelt thanks.

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Lalita Handoo, from Srinagar, Kashmir, received degrees in language and literature from the universities of Kashmir and Kurukshetra University before completing a Ph.D. in folkloristics from the University of Mysore. She taught in various institutions in Kashmir, Jammu, and Kurukshetra before joining the Central Institute of Indian Languages at Mysore as Associate Professor of Lexicography and Folklore in 1972.

Dr. Handoo has lectured in India and abroad, has organized training programs in lexicography and folklore in India, and has published widely on linguistics and folk narrative. Her books include *Folklore and Gender* (with Ruth B. Bottigheimer), Mysore: Zooni Publications, 1999. Other books by Dr. Handoo are *Kashiir ti Kaashur Tahziib* (2002) [Kashmir and Kashmiri Culture] (with O. N. Koul), *Folk and Myth: An Introduction* (1998), *Structural Analysis of Kashmiri Folktales* (1994), *Malto-English-Hindi Dictionary* (with B. Mahapatra and Rekha Sharma) (1987), and *Hindi-Kashmiri Common Vocabulary* (with Jawaharlal Handoo) (1973), all published with the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore.

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Index

Abu-Lughod, Lila, 22, 83
adultery, 100, 108, 116
Afghan, 20
Andhra Pradesh, 2
anklet, 4
audience, 23, 38, 55–56, 59, 64, 72, 81, 83
  effect on narration, 19, 20–21, 62, 90
  response, 15, 20, 21, 61–65, 105

Bauman, Richard, 64
bawdy humor, 18. *See also* obscene songs
Ben-Amos, Dan, 64–65
bībī. *See* saint
Bottigheimer, Ruth, vii, 5, 141–42, 143

caste, 2, 15, 55, 58, 59
  Golla, 2, 16, 89, 92
  Mudaliar, 100
  Nadar, 58
  Yādava, 56
Christian, 10
Cilappaṭikāram, 4
cities and towns. *See also* villages
  Chennai. *See* Madras
  Goa, 10, 38
  Hassan, 5, 6
  Hyderabad, 2, 21, 24, 75, 79
  Kashi, 18. *See also* Varanasi
  Madras (Chennai), 100, 102, 112
  Madurai, 2, 4, 15, 55–65
  Mysore, 37
  Nagari, 102
  New Delhi, 24
  Pondicherry, 2, 38
  Rajamundry, 70
  Sringeri, 5, 6
  Tulunad, 9
  Varanasi, 18, 28n17
  Virudhunagar, 58
Claus, Peter, 9
"convergence," 15, 110–11, 113, 115–18
Cormac, Margaret, 64
"countersystem," 37, 69
cradle song, 1–2, 24–26
crying song, 116, 137n15

dargāh, 16, 19, 82
daughter, 1–3, 19, 21
Day, L. B., 10
Dhar, Asha, 75
districts
  Chikmagalur, 6
  Chittoor, 2, 16, 89
  Godovari, 2, 15, 67–84
  Simla, 10
  Tirunelveli, 2, 15, 55
Doshi, B. V., 80–81
Dracott, Alice E., 10
Dube, Leela, 12
Dundes, Alan, 62

education, 56, 58, 59

false accusation, 100, 103, 108, 116
family relationships:
brother-brother, 108
brother-in-law, 18–19, 116
brother-sister, 6–9, 72–73, 74–75, 106, 107, 108–10
concubine, 37
co-sister(s), 3
daughter-in-law, 19, 37, 57–58, 101–4, 112
father-daughter, 23, 37, 72–73, 93, 96
father-son, 8
grandmother-grandchild, 63, 89
husband-wife, 93, 95, 103
in-laws, 65
mother-daughter, 1–3, 10, 37, 63, 72–73, 89, 101, 113
mother-in-law, 19, 37, 39, 57–58, 103, 106, 112
mother-son, 76, 77, 103, 106
natal vs. conjugal, 3, 6–9, 17, 19, 37, 59–60, 63, 74
parents-daughter, 71–72
sister-in-law, 95, 103, 106, 108, 116
son-in-law, 4, 14–15, 18, 101
stepmother, 70
wife, 39, 56–57
faqīr, 81, 83
Fatima, Bibi, 16, 82
feminist analysis, 22
festival(s), 9
film ("The Hero Pharmacy"), 22
Firth, Raymond, 55
Flueckiger, Joyce, 15, 28n15, 76
Folklore of Southern India, 11
folktale (includes *kāhānī*, *maujūde*, *kathalu*), 11, 69, 81, 82, 89)
food, 42–47, 52n5, 57, 60, 65n1, 78–79, 112, 135n1, 137n9, 137n10, 137n11
forgiveness, 77–78
Frere, Mary, 10
funeral, 97, 106–7

gender, 141
and criticism, 12
and cultural meaning, 11
and content, 79
and interpretation, 13, 61–65
and narration, 15, 77–78, 83, 87
and narrative shift, 72, 75, 79, 119
and politics, 21–22
and protest, 63–64
and religion, 80
and response, 55–65
and secondary literature, 12
Gold, Ann, 9
Grima, Benedicte, 115

Handoo, Lalita, vii, 12, 13, 14–15, 18, 27n2, 141, 144
Handoo, Jawaharlal L., vii
headbath, 100, 106, 107, 112, 136n7
helper, 74
heroine (intelligent), 71, 75
Hindu, 13, 22, 56, 59, 67–68, 71
Honko, Lauri, 91

incest, 17, 109, 117
Indian Fairy Tales, 10–11
International Society for Folk Narrative Research, vii, 141
Iran, 75, 83
isolation, 8
itinerant narratives, 5–6

Kakar, Sudhir, 63, 64
Kanaka Durga, vii, 9, 13–14, 16, 17, 23, 143
Kaṇṇaki, 4
karma (includes *punarjanma*), 19, 112
Kennedy, John M., 56
Koran. *See* Qur'an
Kōvalan, 4

Lakshadweep Islands, 12
Lakṣmī, 3

languages
Bengali, 10
Hindi, 38
Kannada, 5, 18, 27n9, 36
Kashmiri, 36, 38
Punjabi, 38
Sanskrit, 36
Tamil, 4, 20, 55, 56
Telugu, 2, 21, 68, 90, 91
Urdu, 68, 69
lullaby. *See* cradle song
Lyons, John, 55

marriage, 8, 17, 93–96, 97
Mills, Margaret, 12, 13, 20, 84
miracle story (*maujūde*). *See* folktale
Muhammad, 76–78
murder, 109
Muslim(s), 2, 13, 15–16, 67, 81
women's narratives, 67–84
vs. Hindu, 13, 67–68

Narasamamba, Lakshmi, vii, 9, 12, 13, 15–16, 17, 19, 23, 144
Narayan, Kirin, 16, 23
narrative, 21
and culture, 11
and dreaming, 81
and life history, 11, 16, 88, 90, 98, 99–101, 105, 110–19
narrative source. *See* storytellers
narrative style, 68, 111–12
narratives (includes narrative songs)
"The Badshah's Daughter," 17, 70–71
bees protect Fatima Bībī's *dargāh*, 82
bride saves groom from predicted death at fourteen, 79
a brother-and-sister tale, 74
"A Chettiyar with Two Wives," 56–57
illiterate son-in-law, 40–41
"Lyela in the Lamp Stand," 75
molasses and cotton make a hero, 50–51
"A Mother-in-law and Her Daughter-in-law," 57–58, 62
"On a Mother-in-law and Her Daughter," 60
a person who was always in prayer, 78–79
"The Princess in the Golden Cow," 72–73
silent son-in-law, 47–48
son-in-law and bamboo-door curry, 45–47
son-in-law and butter, puppy, sweet, 48–49
son-in-law doesn't eat peacock, 41–44
son-in-law sits high and talks heavy, 39–40
son-in-law's *kaḍabu / budaka*, 44
"A Story in Search of an Audience," 21
"The Story of a Couple," 80
"The Story of the Princess in the Golden Cow," 19
"The Story of a Son," 75–76
stupid groom drowns his bride, 49
"The Tale of the Adulterous Sister-in-law," 108, 116, 126–28
"The Tale of Bībī Segat," 81
"The Tale of Dēvanamma," 9, 109–10, 117, 118, 130–35
"The Tale of the Eight Storks," 60
"The Tale of Kāntha and Kāma," 106–7, 117, 118, 120–24
"Tale of a Man with Two Wives," 61
"The Tale of Sister's Sacrifice for the River Goddess," 9, 107, 117, 118, 124–26
"The Tale of a Sister Who Drives Away the Doves," 108–9, 116, 117, 128–30
"Thirumalai Nayakkar's Wife," 59–60, 62–63
"The Wife and Her Husband," 70
See also numskull tales
narrators, 68–69, 70, 72, 75–76, 79, 83, 88, 89–104, 113–16

natal home song(s), 5–8. See also *tavaru mane*
"native," 13
narrative forms. See *kahānī, maujūde*
numskull tales, 35–39, 51–52

obscene songs, 89, 90, 99
O'Flaherty, Wendy, 88
Old Deccan Days, 10
Oldenburg, Veena, 19
otherness, 13, 14, 22, 36

pāḍḍana, 9
Parthasarathy, R., 4
patriarchy: comment on, 9
Patwardhan, Anand, 22
performance, 13, 14, 23, 68, 70, 88, 90–91, 98–99, 111–12, 115, 119
  analysis, 19–20, 27n13
performer. *See* storyteller
Persia. *See* Iran
Prasad, Leela, vii, 2, 142, 144–45
prayer, 78–79, 80
Proppian analysis, 39, 50, 51
punishment, 76
pyal, 3–4, 97

qisse, 69. *See also* folktale
quest, 71, 75
Qur'an, 68, 70, 81

Raheja, Gloria, 9
Rāma, 3
Ramanujan, A. K., 5, 11, 21, 69, 115
Rāmāyaṇa, 3
Rao, K. V., 84
Rāvaṇa, 3
rebirth, 23–24
refrain, 104, 105
region
  Kangra, 16, 23
  Konkan, 2
religion, 13, 22, 59, 68–69, 78–70, 81–83
Ricoeur, Paul, 91
rural vs. urban, 15, 55–65

Safa, Kaveh, 83
saint (female), 19, 81–83
Santal, 49
Sarkar, Tanika, 22
Sastri, Pandit S. M. Natesa, 11
satī, 21
Segat Bībī, 81–82
sexual violence, 17
shrine. See *dargāh*
Simla Folk Tales, 10
Sītā, 3
song(s), 1–2, 5–8, 15, 22, 37, 89
  "Anklets on the Pyal," 1–2, 24–26
  "Our brother-in-law went to Kashi," 18–19, 26
  "Please go to my Natal Home," 5, 6–7, 25–26
See also narratives, cradle song, *pāḍḍana, tavaru mane*
Souza, Anna Liberata de, 10
Spain, 20
states
  Andhra Pradesh, 2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 36, 67–84, 88–89
  Assam, 38, 44, 51
  Bengal, 38
  Bihar, 36, 38, 44, 48, 49
  Chattisgarh, 15, 28n15
  Goa, 36, 40, 44
  Himachal Pradesh, 16
  Karnataka, 2, 5, 6, 9, 14, 27n2, 36, 37, 38, 44, 49
  Kashmir, 14, 27n2, 36, 37, 40
  Kerala, 2, 36, 40
  Maharashtra, 36, 44
  Madhya Pradesh, 38, 48, 49
  Rajasthan, 9, 38
  Tamilnadu, 2, 15, 36, 44, 55–65
  Uttar Pradesh, 9, 15, 28n15, 36, 38, 44, 48, 51
Stokes, Mary, 11
Stokes, Maive, 10–11
storytellers (includes narrators and performers)
  Abba, 75–76, 78–79
  Amma, 80

ayahs (Dunkni and Muniya), 10–11
barber, 10
brahman men, 10
companion, 10
Deivamanni, Dr., 58, 59–60
"female sources," 11
girl, 15, 70, 80
grandmother, 11, 58, 59, 63
husband, 11
Katyayani, K., 21
Krishnan, 56–58
Lalitā, 25
Mangai, 56
men, 56, 63, 69
mother, 2
Nagarajan, Mrs. S., 24
Radakrishnan, 56
Rājamma, 23, 106–10
Raju, 56
servant (Khidmatgar), 11
Shankar, Vijaya, 24
stepmother, 11
Urmilaji, 23
ustādbi, 15, 68
women, 10, 11, 33, 39–51, 56, 69, 71, 72, 74, 76–77, 81, 82
street-singing, 6
Strobel, Margaret, 84
suicide, 107, 109, 117
summary, 14

Taggart, James, 20
tavaru mane, 5, 6–8
towns. *See* cities and towns
translation, 90–91
Trawick, Margaret, 111
Tunisia, 75

urban context, 56

Venn diagram, 13
Venugopal, Saraswathi, vii, 12, 15, 19–20, 21
village, 55–56, 58
villages
Bhogaon, 36
Calicut, 10
Chavarambakam, 2, 16, 89, 94, 100, 101
Katheru, 70
Melambakam, 102
"Pedagaon," 36
"Tsotalahoom," 36
Uttumalai, 2, 15, 55–65

Webber, Sabra, 75
wedding, 37, 93–94
widowhood, 27n7, 97
wife's merit saves husband, 79
wives (multiple), 20, 61, 92
woman-centered narrative, 5, 88, 105, 118
work, 80, 92–93, 96, 97, 98, 102, 105, 113

Zooni Publications, vii, 141

Response to "All our Srebs" critique

ASIAN STUDIES / LITERATURE

Gender and Story in South India

Leela Prasad, Ruth B. Bottigheimer, and Lalita Handoo, editors

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